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BEADLE'S

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POCKET NOVELS



The Border Renegade.



THE BORDER RENEGADE;

OR,

THE LILY OF THE SILVER LAKE.

BY JOS. E. BADGER, Jr.,

AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING POCKET NOVELS:

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| 59. THE TEXAS HAWKS. | 116. BLACK PANTHER. |
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THE BORDER RENEGADE.

CHAPTER I.

THE DEATH-GRAPPLE.

"DURN the feller—whar kin he be? The sun's more'n a-hour past the dead tree, a'ready, an' he ain't here yit!"

These words were uttered in a subdued tone of disgust, not unmixed with surprise, by a man evidently of white blood, on a clear June day, in the year 1812.

He stood upon the slope of a small hill, and his gaze was roving restlessly around him, now over the woods, now out upon the tranquil surface of Lake St. Clair. His soliloquy explained the meaning of these glances; he was awaiting the arrival of a friend at this, the appointed rendezvous.

In figure he was of an unusually massive build, though but little above the mean hight. His shoulders were of immense breadth, his limbs thick and seemingly clumsy; but it was the great folds of hard muscle that gave him this appearance. His chest was deep and rounded; his hands bony and muscular.

Only in the deep seams and wrinkles upon his face, together with the long hair and beard of a dirty grizzled white, were evidences of his advanced age. His form was as erect, his movements as agile and springy as though still in the prime of life.

He stood leaning upon a heavy barreled flintlock rifle; in the girdle at his waist were a hatchet and long knife. His garb was rude, and partook more of the savage than civilized life. Beaded moccasins covered his feet; a soiled red handkerchief was wound turban-fashion around his head.

His eyes turned from the lake, and glanced upward, where stood the tall scarred trunk of a tree, whose life had vanished before the lightning's searing breath. The sun showed high above its jagged top.

"Wal, ef I must, I must, I s'pose, but while waitin', I'll eat a snack. He won't be much longer, I reckon. Fust time I knowed him to break his word."

The man turned and glided along the hillside toward a bushy topped tree, and choosing a shady spot, sat down, and producing a few fragments of dried meat and corn-cakes from the pouch by his side, began leisurely munching them, occasionally moistening the dry food with copious draughts from a goodly sized flask taken from the same receptacle.

He was seated close to the verge of an abrupt fall in the hill, nearly perpendicular, for some four or five yards. This miniature precipice was formed of rocks, cracked and crumbling, eaten by the frost.

At its foot were scattered numerous boulders, of various sizes, that had fallen from the face, from time to time. Then the hill again sloped gradually down toward the lake, studded here and there with trees and shrubbery.

The hunter was seated in the shade, upon this rock, where the grass and moss formed a comfortable resting-place, all unconscious of the great peril that threatened him. But he was not left long in ignorance.

A slight rustling noise met his ear, trained to watchfulness by a long life of almost constant peril and danger. A noise that to a less trained ear would have passed for a gust of wind playing through the leafy tree-top, or the fall of some decayed twig.

But the hunter thought different. He gave a slight start, but then motionless as a statue, save his eyes, that roved quickly around him, he listened for a repetition of the suspicious sound.

It came, almost immediately, and guided by it, the hunter glanced up into the bushy tree-top, in whose shade he sat. And there a dreaded object met his gaze.

Crouched along a huge gnarled limb that shot out horizontally, was the long, gaunt form of a panther, its greenish yellow eyes glittering with a deadly fire, riveted upon the figure of its intended victim. There could be no mistaking it.

The long form, the slowly sweeping tail, the cat-like head with short ears laid back; the red dripping lips drawn aside until the twin rows of long white fangs were distinctly vis-

ible; the huge, muscular paws, half-clasping the limb, their sharp yellow talons convulsively piercing the rough bark; all proclaimed that ferocious king of the northern forest—the panther.

The keen eye of the old hunter took in all this at a single glance, and more. He saw that the beast was about to spring upon him—that every nerve and muscle was quivering for the deadly leap.

The heavy rifle lay beside him, ready for use, but would he have time to level it? As his only hope, the woodman seized upon it and raised its muzzle toward the threatening beast. But he had not time for more.

Uttering an ear-splitting yell, the panther shot out from the limb, and launched its heavy body, full upon the hunter. It struck first upon the heavy rifle-barrel, and so great was its momentum, that the weapon was twisted from the hands that clutched it, and hurled some yards away, while the beast's body bore the man backward to the ground.

But the disarming had one good result, at least, for it threw the panther partially aside, so that its fore-paws passed to the right of the woodman. And ere it could recover itself, the huge bony hands clutched its throat with a grip rendered doubly strong by despair.

Then ensued a terrific struggle, though of brief duration. The infuriated beast strove to free its head, but the hunter maintained his choking grip with wonderful tenacity, regardless of the painful scratches inflicted upon his arms and body by the cruel claws of the panther.

The force of the wild beast's leap had carried them both still nearer the edge of the miniature precipice. As stated, the face of the rock was cracked and eaten by the action of frost, and the violent struggles of man and beast produced a natural catastrophe.

As they neared the edge of the rock, it suddenly gave way, with a crackling rumble, and precipitated the combatants down upon the jagged rocks below, masses of *debris* rattling after. A cry broke from the lips of the hunter; a shrill yell from the panther; then came a momentary silence, while the cloud of dust slowly rose upon the faint breeze.

The hunter was lying partly upon one side, a rough, jagged

boulder at his back partially supporting him. His feet and legs, up from his knees, were buried beneath a mass of the dingy, crumbling rock.

The panther was at some little distance, crouching down upon a gray boulder, whither it had sprung after the fall, its eyes glowing with mingled rage and affright. But then a low, grating snarl broke from its lips as it settled further back upon its haunches.

The hunter read this action aright. He knew that the maddened beast was preparing to spring upon him, and for the first time a sensation of terror filled his heart. And well he might tremble, for as he strove to draw up his legs, to prepare for the threatened struggle, he found them immovable.

The mighty rock held them to the ground with a force he could not overcome. Held him there to his death, as it seemed!

The great drops of cold perspiration stood thickly out on his brow, and his eyes glared at the beast with an expression of horror and despair. He believed that his time had come; that his long and eventful career, whether of good or evil, was to be terminated by the jaws of a wild beast.

He read aright the deepened glow that filled the creature's eyes. He knew that the crisis was at hand, and, true to his training, resolved to die battling desperately for life; though so helpless, he would not perish a tame victim.

His right hand whipped the long knife from his belt, while the other arm was thrown up before his face. This action seemed a signal for the fearful leap.

With a low, venomous snarl, the panther's form lengthened out and shot through the air, and alighted full upon the hunter's breast. Only for the boulder behind him, the man would have been conquered almost ere he had time to strike one blow in self-defense.

But it supported him, and one strong arm pushed the panther's head back, while the long knife gleamed brightly in the sunlight, as it fell, driven by a powerful hand to the very haft, in the brute's side. Then ensued a confused death-grapple.

A pen can not describe it; the movements were by far too

rapid and changeful. But through it all the strong right arm plied the trusty knife that now shone with a dull reddish glare, while the life-blood of both man and beast plentifully besprinkled the gray rocks.

Such a struggle could not last long. It was by far too fierce, too deadly. Scarcely a score of seconds had elapsed from the leap, ere a brief pause ensued.

The hunter, with blood flowing freely from his body—with blood trickling from a long gash across his face, lay there beneath the heavy body, his strong arm still holding the brute's head back, his eyes fully meeting the fiery glare that filled those of his mad antagonist. One leg of the panther was held as in a vice between the knees of the hunter, while the long talons of the other convulsively pierced the quivering flesh of a leg. Its sleek side was now scored with a dozen gaping wounds, made by the keen knife, from which flowed the hot, steaming blood. Its form trembled and quivered convulsively. Its race was well-nigh run.

Then the knife rose once more—fell—the weapon sunk deep in the broad, heaving chest of the brute. A fierce snarl broke from its lips. Only one; then the fiery glitter dimmed in its eyes, the head drooped, and the huge, cat-like form slowly sunk down upon the panting body of its conqueror.

A gurgling gasp—one convulsive quiver of its mighty frame, and the king of the forest was dead!

Uttering a hoarse curse, the hunter flung the dead brute from his body, and glanced wildly around him. Then a shudder agitated his frame, his eyes closed, and his senses fled.

It seemed as though the victory had been a defeat; that both combatants were dead!

Only for a brief moment, however. Then the head of the hunter raised, and his voice rung out in feeble accents, crying for help. Again, and again, each succeeding cry feebler and less strong.

But only the echoes of his own voice answered him. Only that and the fitful sighing of the spring breeze, as it eddied over the rocks and rustled among the forest trees.

He struggled to a sitting position, and strove to cast aside the

rocks that held his feet. But in vain. The task was beyond his strength. Then with a gasping cry, he sunk back.

One quivering shudder, a twitching of the facial muscles, and then motionless silence. A ghastly gray shade settled down upon his face.

CHAPTER II.

A WARNING CONFIRMED.

A FIGURE of the medium hight, lithe, supple, and rounded in most perfect symmetry. The figure of a woman, a young maiden, strolling dreamily along through the forest-covered hills.

The face was an almost perfect oval, the brows rising up nobly into a high, broad forehead. Large, lustrous eyes, black and glowing, arched with jetty brows; long, silken lashes, now raised as the eyes glanced quickly around, anon shading the twin lights as they drooped.

A small curved mouth, with lips red and slightly pouting; lips that seemed made for kisses. The dimpled chin softly rounded, the shapely neck, closely encircled by the plain dress of woolen fabric; the hands bare and sun-embrowned; the trim, dainty feet incased in jauntily-beaded moccasins. Her head was bare—for in one hand swung the straw hat—and the jetty hair hung in waving curls far down her shoulders.

Such was Agnes Letcher, in so far as words can describe her appearance.

Suddenly she paused, with a considering air, not unmixed with affright. A strange sound had saluted her hearing—the sound of a human voice crying for help.

She stood hearkening, poised upon one foot, in readiness for either flight or advance. Then the cry came again; this time there could be no mistaking it.

Agnes hesitated for a moment, but then started forward, in the direction from whence the sound proceeded. A thought of

probable danger to herself assailed her, but this was quickly banished.

The savages were at peace with the pale-faces, and those of the red race who had visited the lone cabin, had ever met with a kind and cordial welcome. They had vowed eternal peace with their white father, Francis Letcher.

The cry rung out once more, and Agnes located the sound with tolerable accuracy. Then she hastened onward, agitated and troubled.

In a few moments she stood near the spot from whence the cry for help had proceeded, though, as she glanced hurriedly around, nothing unusual met her eye. This at first; but then a torn and bruised piece of turf met her gaze, beside which lay a rifle.

Agnes glided forward and stood upon the edge of a miniature precipice. A cry broke from her lips as she glanced downward. A thrilling sight saluted her eyes.

The dead and mutilated body of a huge beast, that she recognized for a panther, lying doubled up beside a rock; the crimson spots and splashes over the gray boulders; the motionless figure of a human being, lying half-covered up with crumbling rocks, the body and face bearing long, ghastly traces of the wild beast's fearful claws.

Agnes shrunk back in horror and her face turned still more pale, for she believed that the man also was dead. But then the cries—surely he must have uttered them?

"I will go down and see—he may be only fainting," she murmured, agitatedly.

Turning to the left, Agnes ran a few yards, until reaching a point where the descent was less steep, and sure-footed as a goat, she hurriedly clambered down the crumbling rocks. A few moments carried her to where the stranger lay, so death-like and ghastly.

But then she paused, doubting what to do. She had all a woman's horror of death, and surely the sight was sickening enough to excuse this in one of far stronger mind than our fair maiden.

The hunter's garments were tattered and rent, the lacerated flesh showing through them, where the cruel claws had been at work. The blood had flown freely, and, saturating the

rude garments, stood in fast-coagulating pools upon the rocky ground.

A feeble moan broke the stillness, sounding fearfully loud to the agitated senses of the maiden. Then, as she glanced at the stranger's face, Agnes uttered a little cry.

His eyes were open, and regarding her with a wondering expression. Agnes shuddered as she shrunk back, for it seemed to her that a baleful light was glowing in their depths; much as she would have felt at the fascinating glitter of a serpent's eyes.

"Who—who air ye?" muttered the wounded hunter, as he struggled to arise; and then his head fell back, and he uttered a moan of pain.

All the womanly sympathies of the maiden's nature were aroused at this, and Agnes sprung forward, kneeling beside him. She tenderly raised his head from the jagged rock, but again felt that strange repulsion, as his eyes met hers. She mechanically answered the question thus mutely repeated.

"I'm Agnes Letcher—I live only a little way from here. I heard your cries for help, and came to see what was the matter."

"That painter—he did it. Jumped on me unawares, as I was eatin'. But I finished the imp!" muttered the stranger, with a savage satisfaction in his husky tones.

"But you—you are badly hurt, I'm afraid?"

"I don't know—mebbe so. Reckon it's from bleedin' so, mor'n any thin' else. I think I could git up ef 'twasn't for them rocks on my feet. The scratches didn't 'mount to much, I reckon—on'y skin deep. My legs hurts the wust," and a groan broke from the hunter's lips, as he strove to move.

Agnes sprung up, and with eager haste, began removing the rocks that covered the man's feet. Though forming a goodly pile they were so frost-eaten and cracked, that her strength was sufficient to remove them, one by one, revealing the left leg of the sufferer doubled awkwardly over a boulder.

"Thank ye, miss. You're a good gal to help a feller," muttered the old man, with a sigh of relief.

"It is nothing. I would do as much for a dog, if I found him helpless. But try—can not you get up?"

"If you'll help me—I don't like to trouble ye so much, but—"

Agnes stooped, and he passed one arm over her shoulder. Then he slowly rose erect, but a cry grated through his clenched teeth, as his weight rested upon the leg. It had evidently been injured more seriously than he thought.

"It's no use," he muttered, as he sunk back upon the boulder, "I cain't do it. Reckon my leg's broke. Feels like it, anyhow."

His voice was low and even, but the great drops that started out upon his blood-stained face, told how great was his agony. He bore the torture like a veritable savage.

"I can not help you by myself, but you must not stay here. Father is at home—I will go for him, if you can wait here."

"I cain't very well help myself, the way things is. But it don't seem right fer a pritty gal like you to wait on a old feller sech as I be," and his gray eyes rested admiringly upon the flushed countenance of Agnes, until she turned away in confusion.

"I will not be long—it is less than a mile to our house, from here. Once there, my father will soon cure your hurts."

"Wait a bit. Did you see any thin' o' a rifle 'round here? The mate o' this pesky painter may be snoopin' around, an' 'd soon finish what t'other started."

"Yes—wait a moment and I'll get it."

In a few moments Agnes returned with the weapon, and the hunter seized it with a cry of delight. A glance assured him that it had not been injured, and as he turned to thank the maiden, he saw she had left him, and was already speeding along the hillside.

Muttering indistinctly to himself, the hunter renewed the priming, and then bent over to examine the injured leg. To his great joy, he found that no bones were broken, though the flesh was lacerated and sadly bruised.

"'Tain't much; it'll be all right in a week, if I let whisky alone," he uttered, with a grimace at the last words. "But, Lord! thet gal! A angel, ef ever thar was one on airth! I've heard tell lots o' her, but I thought 'twas all lies. It

must be the one: Letcher, an' lives nigh here. Yas, it is, shore!"

Nearly an hour rolled by, and the hunter remained buried in deep meditation, and not the most pleasant, either, judging from the black frown that rested upon his face. But then he was aroused by the sound of approaching footsteps on the hillside below him.

That danger was no stranger to his life, was shown by the manner in which he raised his rifle, and the flashing of his gray eye. But then the weapon was lowered, as he recognized the figure of Agnes Letcher, coming toward him, accompanied by an elderly man, rudely clad, bearing a rifle and heavy ax.

"Hellow, stranger, glad to see ye!" called out the hunter, as this latter personage glanced toward him. "Got into a pesky scrape here, mebbe ye know."

"So I see. But never mind. We'll fix that all right in a little time," responded Letcher, in a cheery tone, but with a keen glance into the hunter's face. "You are a stranger here, I see. I don't remember ever meeting with you before this."

"We didn't happen thar at the same time, I reckon, though I've see'd your cabin more'n oncet. Thought I'd drap in to-day for a bit, but this painter fooled me. Mebbe you've heerd o' me though—Con Orem?"

"I don't remember the name," said Letcher, thoughtfully. "But never mind now. The first thing is to get you where I can attend to your hurts. I'll have to make a litter, I guess, as Agnes says you can not walk. Is your leg broken?"

"No, jest smashed up a bit. But if you'll lend me your arm, I guess I kin git along."

"Best not try it further than the foot of the hill; it might be dangerous. I can drag you in a litter, better, then."

With the strong arm of Letcher to assist him, Con Orem reached the foot of the hill, and then the ax of the dextrous woodsman quickly fashioned a rude litter, upon which the wounded man reclined. Then it was a comparatively easy task for the sturdy settler to drag him along through the forest, to the little cabin where he lived, Agnes following and carrying both rifles.

The cabin was built of logs, and fashioned with an eye to defense against the Indians, situated in a pleasant opening, close beside a running spring. A small plot of ground was under cultivation, that evidently helped to eke out the game procured in abundance from the surrounding woods.

Several years before the date of our story, Francis Letcher came here and settled down to an almost hermit-like life. He had fled from the society of his fellow-men, not from any sin of his own, but was driven to the forest wilds by a heart-crushing sorrow.

The hand of death had fallen heavily upon his once-happy family. The wife and mother died first, followed in close succession by a son and daughter, leaving only Agnes alive, with her father.

Utterly heart-broken, the bereaved man disposed of his business, and, together with his only child, wandered restlessly to the vicinity of the Great Lakes, finally settling where we find them, on the banks of the St. Clair.

Con Orem was quickly made comfortable in the cabin, and treated very kindly. But still he did not appear at ease. Something seemed weighing heavily upon his mind.

His eyes were ever roving restlessly around him, unless when Agnes was in view. Then they were riveted upon her face or form, with an intentness she found far from agreeable, though there was naught save a respectful admiration—at times almost of veneration—visible in the gray depths.

That, and the succeeding day and night, passed by in quietness. Yet he was very reserved, and rarely spoke unless first addressed, brooding over his great loss, that his heart felt fully as acutely now as years before, when the blow first fell.

But the uneasiness of Orem continued to increase, until Agnes could not help but notice it, and finally spoke to her father regarding it. But the time was near at hand when they both would understand the matter better.

The hunter was rapidly regaining his usual strength and the use of his bruised limb. He could hobble around with comparative ease, and shortly after breakfast, on the second day following the one when had occurred his death-grapple, he announced his intention of departing.

"Why so—what's the hurry? You are not fit yet to travel the woods. Stay a little longer," hospitably urged Letcher.

"I cain't—I must be goin', though I'd like to stay longer, mighty well. It's bin very pleasant fer me," and he cast a wistful glance toward Agnes. "The pleasantest days I kin remember. But I must be goin'."

"Your business is not so urgent, I am sure."

"It is—a heap more so'n you think. But you've bin kind to me when I was onder the weather. I hain't got much to give, but I'll show ye I hain't so ongrateful as mought be. But fust—you don't go to the settlements often?"

"No—I came here to be alone. I was at Detroit a few months ago for ammunition. You are the only white man I've seen since."

"But Injuns—you see *them*?"

"Yes, occasionally. They sometimes stop here for food, and to rest."

"They seem fri'ndly?"

"Yes. We have ever made a point of treating them kindly; why should they be otherwise?"

"In time o' peace thet sounds all right enough, fri'nd, but not *now*. When the hatchet is dug up, an' the war trail folloed, a Injun knows no fri'nd except those who is of the same color. A white scalp is a mighty good thing, an' looks big in thar eyes, an' those very ones who hes ett an' drunk 'th you the oftenest, 'd be the fust one to stick a tomahawk into this pritty head here."

Orem spoke earnestly, and Letcher glanced keenly into his face. He saw the truth written there, and felt that this was no idle warning.

"Speak plainer—you really do not mean that the Indians have taken the war-path again? that peace is broken?"

"I jest do. Thet's jest what I mean. I tell it fer truth, fri'nd. Ef war hain't bin openly declared 'twixt the old country an' us here, it will be afore many days. The redskins hes struck more'n one lick a'ready. Tecumseh is stirrin' them all up, an' he's got the Pottawatomies, Delawares an' a lot o' the Miamis to jine him, thet I know on. They'll make a clean sweep this time, ef they kin. Yeh're in a bad

place here, an' ef you'll take my advice, you'll strike out for Detroit, jest as soon as you possibly kin. A day more may be too late."

"Why did you not tell me this before? Why wait until now?" demanded Letcher, suspiciously.

"Jest think a bit an' you'll see. You was a stranger to me. You seem to keep away from all the whites. Then how'd I know but you was a good fri'nd to the red-skins? A trail-scout don't break kiver 'ithout seein' some way o' gittin' cl'ar. But thar's time yit. Take your boat an' go. Ef not fer your own sake, think o' *her*," said Con Orem, again glancing toward Agnes.

"Will you go with us?"

"Yas—part way; but thar's work fer me to do. Now I kin travel ag'in, I must go on and warn sich whites as live in dangersome places, too fur from the settlements to hear the news in time. I'll go with ye as fur as the river; a'ter thet it's all plain travelin' to the fort."

"Wait, then. I must think it over. I'll give you an answer soon," said Letcher, as he turned from the cabin and strolled toward the lake shore, deep buried in thought.

Con Orem seated himself beside the fireplace, and lighting his pipe, smoked vehemently. His gray eyes closely watched Agnes through the curling wreaths of hazy smoke, as she busied herself with household duties, all unconscious of the trouble brewing, for the conversation had been carried on beyond her hearing.

Only a few minutes had elapsed since the departure of Letcher, ere the inmates of the cabin were startled by a terribly significant sound from without. A clear rifle-crack rung out, followed by several others, these last accompanied by loud, shrill yells, that could only emanate from the throats of savages.

Agnes uttered a shriek, and a bitter curse broke from the lips of Orem as he sprung toward the door. Right well did they divine the meaning of that alarm. They knew that the worst had come—that the savage foe was upon them.

"Easy, gal—easy!" cried Orem as he caught Agnes by the arm and restrained her from rushing from the building. "They'll on'y shoot ve, too, ef ye show out thar!"

"But father—they have killed my father!" gasped Agnes, as she struggled desperately in the hunter's strong grasp.

"No they hain't—see, thar he comes!"

And such was indeed the case. Through the open door could be seen the tall form of Letcher, bounding rapidly toward the cabin, glancing over his shoulder at the yelling savages who had fired upon him.

These last had evidently just landed from several canoes, that were visible from the cabin, stranded upon the lake shore, and the unsteady motion of these crafts had probably saved the recluse from falling a victim to the rifle bullets of the Indians. And now, as if confident of an easy victory, the savages darted after the fleeing figure, brandishing their weapons, but making no attempt to shoot him down.

"See—he's all right. Go now an' close the window quick. I'll stay here an' bar the door a'ter him," hurriedly uttered Con Orem, and he released Agnes.

She did as bade, and swung to the heavy slab shutter, securing it with a cross-bar. The next instant Letcher dashed into the cabin, and then the heavy door swung shut, and the stout bars were dextrously dropped into their fastenings by the old hunter.

Scarcely was this accomplished, when a heavy jar shook the cabin to its very foundations. The savages had rushed in a body against the door, hoping, no doubt, to burst it open ere the pale-faces could secure it perfectly. But in this they were disappointed.

The actions of Con Orem were prompt and decided, showing him a man used to critical emergencies. He snatched Letcher's rifle from his hand, and thrusting its muzzle through a loop-hole, fired.

Then he sprung to the fire-place and regained his own weapon. But this time the weapon was not discharged.

"The imps is gone!" he cried, with a low chuckle; "they've tuck to kiver, now they see thar's a show fer a skrimmage. They ain't overly fond o' standin' up afore a white man's rifle, when its muzzle's turned toward thar own hides."

"Father are you—say you are not hurt?" tremblingly cried Agnes, as she sprung forward and clung to her parent's form.

"No, I am not—I don't think so. It came so sudden, that I hardly know whether they hit me or not," half-laughed Letcher.

"How'd it happen?"

"I was by the water, and chanced to look toward the point, where I saw three canoes. As I turned toward the house, they fired at me. The rest you know as well as I do."

To Agnes' great joy, Letcher was unharmed, but then she shuddered apprehensively, as a chorus of loud yells arose from without. The dreaded enemy had not abandoned their anticipated victims, and the worst was yet to come.

"How many was thar? Did you see?" thoughtfully asked Orem.

"Three boats full—over twenty, I know."

"Too many, by hafe! But mebbe it 'll be all right yit," muttered the old hunter, as he listened intently to the yells that still went up from the wood beyond. "They're Delawares—I know thar yell."

There was a peculiar cadence in the tones of Orem, as he uttered the last words, that caused Letcher to glance inquiringly toward him. But the swarthy features of the old hunter were unreadable to the eyes of the recluse.

CHAPTER III.

FRIEND OR FOE?

FRANCIS LETCHER was naturally very uneasy, for although his past life had not been so happy that he would greatly regret leaving it altogether, so far as himself was concerned, there was still one dear tie that bound him to earth, in the presence of his daughter. For Agnes, then, he was anxious to live; he could not leave her alone, without friends or kindred.

Strange as it may appear, Con Orem was the most uneasy and perturbed of the trio. And yet that might be because

he realized their peril more thoroughly than did his companions in misfortune.

The cries and yells of the savages had now utterly ceased. Not a sign of their presence could be detected from the house; even the canoes had disappeared from the lake shore.

As Letcher observed this, his countenance lightened, for, in his ignorance of savage nature—at least where they were upon the war-path—he believed they had retreated and abandoned the object as hopeless, or else one in which the hope of reward was overbalanced by the danger they must first encounter.

"They've gone—thank God!" he exclaimed, fervently, as he turned from his loop.

"Don't you b'lieve it fri'nd," quickly responded Orem, with a significant shake of his head. "'Tain't thar natur' to do sech. Thar's a heap more for us to be skeered of now, then when they're like a bit sence. *Thet* told they was undecided—didn't know what to do fust, like. But *this* sais they've settled onto some plan, an' air a-carryin' it out. Be shore you'll see 'em soon enough—an' *feel* 'em, too, if things don't turn out better'n I expect. What is one man—for they don't know 'at I'm here, an' they *do* know who you air, in course. What is one man an' a gal, then, to skeer out twenty redskins, fresh on the war-path? No, no; you've mistook, fri'nd. Depend on't, you're wrong in your guess."

"Do you really think so?"

"I do, sartinly. They're Delawares—I know *thet* by thar yells. They'll be 'mong the very wust the whites'll hev to deal with, this war. They've bore a heap, o' past years, an' 'll go in heavy, now, to wipe it out. I know 'em well—I've scouted 'th some o' thar best braves, in time o' peace. They're cunnin' warriors, an' stick cluss to thar work," added the old hunter, thoughtfully.

"But what do you advise, then? How do you think it will end?"

"Twenty ag'in two; you kin count up the odds yourself, easy," coolly replied Orem.

"But the cabin is strong—help may come."

"From whar? No, no; depend on't, this is no boy's play. *It's a war*, mind ye, an' I sadly doubt me, ef thar's a hafe-do-

men cabins in all Michigan but what is spotted, just as your'n is. Detroit, Chicago Creek Post, an' all is marked down for massacre. More folks'll need help than'll git it, I'm dubious."

"Well, we have two rifles, plenty of food, water and ammunition. We can die like men, if no more. They shall have no bloodless victory to boast over."

"But, father, may they not burn the house?" timidly suggested Agnes.

Letcher started at these words. It was a peril he had not thought of, strangely enough. The cabin was built of pine logs, mostly, now dry and resinous. Thoroughly seasoned, they would easily ignite, and there were no means of extinguishing the flames, though the cabin contained drinking water sufficient for several days, with proper economy.

"No, don't fear that," observed Orem. "They'll hardly try thet plan, ontel others fail. It'd warn the other settlers, mebbe too soon for the plans o' the Injuns. They'll try a rush, fust, I think."

"Well, since it must come, I would it were now. This suspense is dreadful!" muttered Letcher, peering from his loophole.

"It may be the means o' savin' us all, yit," slowly observed the old hunter.

"What do you mean?" quickly demanded the recluse, turning and gazing keenly into the man's face.

"Now honest—do you think thet we—us two—kin rub out all those red-skins afore they bu'st open the door?"

"No—I do not even hope it. Only we will sell our lives dearly. If they attack us earnestly, I see no earthly hope for us."

"Wal, then, ef we must fall into thar hands, anyhow, wouldn't it be better to do so afore blood is drawed, to make 'em still madder? Ef you do rub out a hafe-dozen or so, will that make our chainces any better'n they be now?"

"I don't understand you; speak plainer," said Letcher, dubiously eying the hunter.

"An' yit, I said the words plain a-plenty. Yov say you know we can't whip 'em?"

Letcher nodded assent.

"Then in course they must bag us. Ef we rub out any o' them in doin' it, will they let us go free—think?"

"No, certainly not. They will kill us. But I expect that, and must have some little satisfaction, first," moodily responded Letcher.

"Yes, an' tew to one 'at they'll put us all to the tortur', fust. Even to be pris'ners 'll be better'n thet, wouldn't it? We'd hev a chaine to escape, then, sometime, while ef a feller's clean dead, he *cain't*—kin he?"

"Look here, sir," sternly uttered the recluse. "Speak plainer. You have some covert object in this talk; then tell it in plain words, that I may know how to answer you. This is no time for idle talk. Speak out, pray."

"I will, then. You know I told you I hed bin 'mongst the Delawares a good bit, in peace times. So I hev, an' I oncet hed a lettle 'fluence over 'em, though it may not 'mount to much, now they're on the war-path, hot fer skelps. Yit I think I kin save your lives—yours an' her'n—ef you trust to me. I don't say 'at they'll let you go free, at fust, but I kin promise 'at you'll on'y be kept pris'ners ontel the trouble is over, or you kin buy yourself off. But I *know* I kin promise your *lives*," earnestly added Orem.

"How will you do it?"

"Jest this-a-way. I'll open the doors an' let 'em in. They may treat us a leetle rough, at fust, but when they see who I am, an' thet we don't mean to make 'em any trouble, they'll let up."

"But you've fired upon them already."

"Not at them—I didn't shoot to hit any thin', onlest meb-oe 'twas the tree-tops on the lake, yonder. I grabbed your gun, to keep you from doin' it, for I counted on this plan. knowed they was Delawares, from the fust yelp, an' thought we could do better'n to fight ag'in ech odds."

"Your actions are as strange as your words. How do I know you are not one of them—that you are not one of those accursed white renegades who consort with the savages?" suspiciously added Letcher, nervously fingering his rifle.

"Father!" cried Agnes, springing between the two men, with a frightened glance at the flushed and angry countenance of the old hunter.

"You talk 'th a bitter tongue, fri'nd, an' 'thout thinkin' on your words," slowly uttered Orem. "What hev I did to make you think thet? Ef I *was* one, what would 'a' bin easier 'n fer me to 'a' wiped you both out, while you slept? Or to 'a' kerried off your da'ter while you was out in the woods? Wouldn't I 'a' kep' you from comin' in here, a bi' ago, ef I was a renegade? But I look over it—you don' mean what you say."

"If I was wrong, I ask your pardon," added Letcher, more calmly. "But your words are strange. We are here in a stout cabin, and can defend ourselves. Then why open the way for those merciless devils to enter and slay us unresistingly? No! I will fight it out to the end, and die, if I must, as a man should, weapon in hand."

"Think well on it, fust, fri'nd. Think what it 'll be, ef ef you rub out one on 'em, an' t'others git ye. Think o' *her*—what'll be *her* fate?"

"I do—I have. But she shall never fall into their power alive. Better death by a father's hand, than fall a captive to *them*. Agnes, darling, you wish this, too?"

"Yes—a thousand times, yes!"

The two met in a fervent embrace, while the grizzled hunter stood gazing upon them with strangely-conflicting emotions written upon his wrinkled visage. But then there settled over his face an expression of stern resolve.

"So be it, then! We'll do the best we know how, but you'll be sorry for't. I offer you the on'y chaine—ef you throw it away, it'll be your death."

"Say no more—I refuse your offer, once for all," sternly responded the recluse.

Con Orem turned toward his loophole, while Letcher did likewise. Agnes stood beside her father, and all were silent.

Not a sound broke the stillness without. The forest seemed deserted by all human life. But not one of the trio was deceived by this seeming security. They knew that their peril was never more imminent than now, though their gaze searched the woods in vain for some sign of their merciless foes.

Thus a few more minutes passed by, fraught with the most trying suspense. Thus doomed to inaction, while feeling as

sure that their enemies were subtly planning their destruction, not knowing from which direction, or in what shape the blow would come, was indeed agonizing.

Then the suspicious silence without was broken, by a great variety of sounds. Calls of beasts and birds issued from the forest in every direction.

"What does that mean, Orem?" whispered Letcher.

"The Injuns—they're 'bout to make some move. 'Tain't too late yit—best let me talk to 'em," anxiously responded the old hunter.

Letcher vouchsafed no reply, but motioned Agnes to retreat into the fire-place, where there would be no danger of her being struck by a random bullet, in the strife that seemed near at hand.

"No, let me stay with you."

"You could do no good, and would only be in the way. Go, and be prepared for the worst. We will die together."

A rattling volley broke from the woods, aimed at the open loops, and Letcher had a narrow escape, one of the leaden missiles chipping a fragment from close beside his face. The evident object of the Indians was accomplished, for the whites drew back from their observatories.

Then came the sudden rushing of numerous feet, and as Letcher turned again to his loop, he beheld a body of red-skins burst from the forest and dash toward the cabin, bearing in their midst a heavy log, to be used as a battering-ram against the door. He uttered a low cry, and thrust his rifle-muzzle through the loophole.

But it was not discharged. A strong hand suddenly seized and twisted the weapon from his grasp; an attack from within!

At the same time a shrill yell rung in his ears—a war-whoop of the Delawares, similar to those that had been uttered by the red-skins in the forest. And following it came a second cry; one something similar, yet with a different intonation.

Letcher turned with a hoarse cry of mingled rage and surprise. Before him, with the rifle still in his hand, stood the old hunter, Con Orem!

"I'll save ye in spite of your teeth!" the latter uttered, in a

A PAUSE.

distinct tone. "You shain't kill the ga' 'th your bulk cussedness!"

The war-whoop had been scarcely less startling in its effect upon those outside. The Indians, who were rushing furiously toward the cabin-door, uttered exclamations of wondering surprise, and paused as with one accord, though still holding the ram, poised in their arms.

"You traitor—you *are* a renegade!" hissed the recluse, as he sprang toward Orem with clenched hands. "I'll kill you for this!"

"Father!" cried Agnes, and, as once before, she darted forward and interposed her frail form between the two men, thus strangely at odds.

"Easy, fri'nd," coolly added Orem, as he stepped aside, thus bringing himself nearer the door. "Ef you won't let me save you by your own free will, I'll do it ag'inst it, then. You've no call to ruinate others with yourself."

A peculiar cry now rung out from the savages, who still stood wondering; a cry that the old hunter evidently recognized, for he turned his head and once more pealed forth the two cries that had caused such a change in the state of affairs.

Then he sprang to the door and removed the upper bar. At this unmistakable token of his intentions, Letcher broke from the restraining arms of his daughter, and sprang upon the hunter, with a heavy knife glittering in his grasp.

"Drop that—drop it, you cowardly sneak!" hissed the recluse, in furious rage. "Drop it, I say, or I'll cut your black heart out of your body!"

A dangerous glow filled the gray eyes of the old hunter, at this deadly assault, and a dark scowl of anger swept athwart his face. As the bright steel flashed above his breast, he flung up an arm, catching Letcher's wrist upon it, and thus warded off the venomous blow.

"Thar—how d'y' like my way o' drappin' things?" Orem cried, as the heavy bar was uplifted by the massive right arm, then falling forcibly upon the head of the recluse, it felled him to the floor like a log.

"Oh! my father—you've killed him—he's dead!" gasped Agnes, as she flung herself upon the prostrate form, and raising a hand as though to ward off another blow.

"No, he's on'y stunted. I must 'a' did it, or he'd 'a' killed me. I did it to save all our lives," hastily uttered Orem, as he removed the other bar, and flung the door wide open.

Another yell arose from the savages, and they sprung forward in eager haste. But then again they paused.

Con Orem stood there in the doorway, with a stern smile as of conscious security upon his face. A name broke from their lips, and they gazed wonderingly upon the gray-haired hunter.

Letcher now opened his eyes and stared confusedly around him. As he noted the open doorway and the astonished redskins standing without, he sprung to his feet with a low cry. Orem made a gesture toward the Indians, then turned and confronted the recluse. There was a slightly contemptuous cadence in his tones, as he spoke.

"You see now that I didn't promus more'n I could do, don't ye? Now you jest keep quiet an' don't spile it all by none o' your foolishin'. Ef you do, an' make 'em mad, it'll be the death o' both you an' the gal. Air you willin' to let me work the job, or do *you* want to be boss? Speak quick."

"Let him, father," murmured Agnes, shrinking back from the fiercely admiring gaze of the red-men. "I believe he can do as he says."

"You're right, lettles 'un. I *kin* do't, an' I will, fer your sake, though he sca'cely desarves it. What is it, then, *you*? Shell I or shain't I?"

"Yes—go on," muttered Letcher.

Orem turned again, and seeing the Indians were gradually drawing nearer, he motioned them back. They were regarding the proceedings with evident dissatisfaction, but this fact he affected not to observe.

"These braves follow you, Nahcoma?" he uttered, speaking in the Delaware dialect, and addressing a middle-aged warrior of grim aspect.

"Yes. What is it Red Fish wishes? A cloud is over the mind of the Delaware—he can not see clear," slowly replied the petty chief.

"It shall be lifted. But why are you here?"

"Does Red Fish ask? Surely he knows that our Great Father has promised to help the red-men drive the Long-

knives from the land of our fathers? Tecumseh says—go, kill, scalp your enemies. We obey his words. The war-path lies long before us. Our weapons are thirsty for white blood. Our girdles are empty, because we have trod the war-path but a short time. See! here are two scalps—we will take them!" and the savage pointed toward Agnes and her father.

"No, that must not be. These people are my friends. They must not be harmed. They saved my life, and I will fight for them, if need be. You must kill me first, before you take their scalps. But think. What will the Great Chief say, when he asks you where Red Fish is, and you tell him that his friend died by your hand, defending those who had brought him back to life, when his feet were entering the long trail that leads to the happy hunting-grounds? Will he be glad and say it is well? No! He will disgrace you—cut the totem from your breast and send you to hoe corn in the fields with the other squaws.

"Look! the woods are wide. There are the people of white blood, living on ground that your fathers owned, whose bones are turned up for the hogs to root at, by their iron plows. Go there. Kill them—take scalps—let white blood cover the level ground until you can paddle your canoes upon it, but do not harm these people. I will fight for them. They are my friends. I have spoken!"

The old hunter uttered these words with a fervor that was almost eloquence, and his every action was watched with absorbing interest by father and daughter, who, though they understood not his words, knew that he was interceding for their lives. Upon him now depended their only hope.

The keen eye of Con Orem glanced over the group of savages, and he saw that, though they were displeased, none among their number appeared willing to take upon himself the task of disputing his words. He added:

"Well, is it peace or war? If you do not fear the anger of your chief, come on. You can have their scalps—but you must take mine first. Which brave among you will lift his hand to strike the first blow at the heart of Red Fish?"

"No one. Red Fish has said these pale-faces were his friends, and that is enough. We will pass on. They may go free," coldly responded Nahcoma.

"It is well. We are still brothers. There is food in the lodge. Will my brothers rest and eat?"

"No. A Delaware thinks only of his enemies scalps when treading the war-trail."

Nahcoma uttered a few brief commands to his braves, and then turning, strode rapidly toward the spot where their canoes were hidden. In a few moments the last Delaware had disappeared from view of those who still stood at the cabin.

Con Orem did not speak, but crouching down upon the door-step, deliberately proceeded to light his pipe. While thus occupied, his eyes were furtively glancing toward Letcher, who still stood near the threshold.

The face of the recluse betrayed a breast filled with strongly-conflicting emotions, but the words that struggled for utterance were choked back. But then he stepped forward and gazed steadily into the face of the old hunter.

Con Orem arose and returned the glance, unflinchingly. Agnes gazed at them, in half-alarm.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WHITE DELAWARE.

FRANCIS LETCHER was the first to break the silence, and his voice was troubled as he spoke.

"In the name of God, man, who are you?"

"Your fri'nd, I hope. Anyhow, that's what I want to be," responded the old hunter, drawing in short, quick puffs upon his pipe.

"Surely he is our friend, father," interrupted Agnes, earnestly. "He saved us from those terrible savages!"

"I know, but how? Who is he to have such great influence over them? He is of our own race, and should be an enemy, not a friend to them. I can not understand it!"

"Then don't try, fri'nd. Mebbe it's better fer us both that you don't. Let it go. I told you I had some 'fluence over

the Delawares, an' now you see I didn't lie. Jest take it fer what it's wuth, an' look on me as a fri'nd. Hain't I proved I was one?" uttered Orem, as Letcher fancied, uneasily.

"How do I know that it is all as it seems? Where have they gone? What did you tell them?"

"Didn't ye hear me?"

"I do not understand Delaware."

"I told 'em you two was my fri'nds, an' thet ef they was bound to hev your skelps, they must take mine fust. They knowed should they do thet, thar chief would be down on 'em heavy for't, an' so they left. But what's the use foolin'? Thar's other war-parties in the woods, an' the next thet comes may not be any I know. Then whar'd we be? Rubbed out Then le's travel fer the fort."

"Will you go with us?"

"Part way, as I told ye afore."

"You think there's danger of our meeting with other Indians?"

"I doubt so—cain't say fer shore, but it's likely. Never mind *thet*. I'll see ye safe through. Come, be ye goin'?"

"No—not before night falls to cover our movements. I will not expose Agnes to such danger," firmly responded the recluse.

"Jes' listen! The man's crazy! Why, durn it all, man, you run ten times the danger *here* 'at you would in the woods. Thar, it'd be a chaine meetin', while here, the reds know jest whar to look to find ye. Ef thar's another party 'ithin miles o' here, they'll call at the cabin—*boun'* to, I tell ye. Lis'en to reason, an' take to the woods, while thar's a chaine. It's all your lives is wuth to stay here," impatiently cried Con Orem.

"Here we have a chance to defend ourselves. In the woods, what could one man do, and he incumbered with a helpless child? Nothing. It would be certain death. I will stay here," was Letcher's resolute reply.

"Look a-here, man, you fa'rly make me sick 'ith sech talk. Ef you was alone, durn me ef I wouldn't let you go to the devil in your own way. I wouldn't bother my head 'bout ye no longer. Sech a pesky, onreasonable fool hedn't orter live, ~~no~~how. But thar's *she*. She saved my life—fer I must 'a'

bled to death, soon, on'y fer her findin' me. I won't see her kerflummuxed thet way. I tell you, man, ef you trust to me, I'll take you clean through, though all the Injuns 'twixt here an' the salt water shed stand afore us. They won't dar' cross my will—not one on 'em; not even Tecumseh hisself. I didn't 'low to tell ye, but you driv me to it. I wanted Miss, thar, to think o' me as a man she could like an' pray fer, as a fri'nd. But you're so durned contrairy!"

There were strangely mingled feelings in this speech, and the countenance of the grizzled hunter worked curiously. It was evident how sorely he dreaded to cast off the mask he had worn before Agnes.

"Who are you?—I ask you again. Tell me the truth. Who are you that can make such promises?" uttered the recluse, in a strained tone, his hand tightening its grasp upon the rifle he had regained, and an expression of suspicion written upon his countenance.

"I'm George Girty—Red Fish, the Delawares call me," was the reply, and the massive frame straightened and a glow of conscious power overspread the weatherbeaten face.

A cry of horror broke alike from the lips of father and daughter. Instinctively they shrunk back, and the recluse half-raised his rifle.

George Girty! The synonym of all that was cruel, blood-thirsty and ferocious! The name of a renegade whose deeds of murder and rapine rendered him no less infamous in the North-western States than those of his brothers, Simon and James Girty.

The renegade stood erect and motionless, but the glow faded from his eyes, and an expression of sadness took its place, as he noted the glance of horror and loathing cast upon him by Agnes, who clung trembling to the arm of her father. It showed that human nature was not entirely dead within him; that under different circumstances he might have been a good and true-hearted man, instead of the infamous apostate that history has recorded with a blood-red stain.

"My God! and we have been harboring such a demon? We have eaten and drank with you—Girty, the renegade!" gasped Letcher, in horror.

"An' hed both your lives saved by him—why don't ye add

that, too?" bitterly retorted Girty, his face glowing and his entire frame quivering with illy-suppressed anger, at the intense loathing expressed by Letcher. "On'y fer *thet* same cussed renegade, you'd 'a' both bin dead an' cold afore this. I wonder the airth don't open an' swaller ye up, 'ca'se you was wicked enough to be saved by sech a devil!"

"You saved us from them that we might become *your* prey - but you will be foiled! I will kill you first!" cried the renegade, as he threw forward his rifle.

"Thar—don't shoot. See—I don't offer to 'fend myself. I want to be your fri'nd," hastily uttered Girty, raising one hand, but making no other effort to avert the threatened doom.

"You—a *friend*!"

"You act like a *man*, *you* do, I must say, to taunt a feller when you know *thet* he won't hurt ye, ef on'y fer *her* sake. On'y fer *her*, I'd kill ye like I would a mad wolf, fer those words. But you're *her* father. The on'y white person, sence my mother died, *thet* hes spoken a kind word to me, or treated me like a human critter. I cain't ferget *thet*. You kin raise your gun an' plug me, ef you will. I won't try to hender ye. To save my life, I wouldn't lift a finger ag'inst ye now."

Letcher hesitated. The man's words affected him strangely. He could not shoot him down, though he knew he had deserved death ten thousand times over. It looked too much like murder.

Girty stood moodily looking upon them, his pipe upon the ground at his feet. The brutal, ferocious renegade appeared strangely altered from his usual self.

"No, I will not harm you now. You saved our lives. But go. I trust we may never meet again, but if we do, the past must be forgotten, I will shoot you down at sight. Go now, while it is time," sternly said Letcher.

"Wait, a bit. I will go, but I must say a few words fust. I don't want *her* to think me sech a devil as men paint me, though I know I've bin bad enough, an' hev did a heap o' things that I hedn't orter, mebbe. But *thar's* some excuse. I wouldn't say so to any one but *her*, but *thar's* somethin' in them eyes an' in that face, which tetches my heart, an' makes me a nother sort o' man, altogether," and the voice of the renegade audibly trembled, as he spoke.

"But lis'en," he continued, in a more steady voice. "Ef I'd hed a better show, when I was young, mebbe I'd 'a' turned out a dif'rent sort o' man. Luck went dead ag'in' me from the very fust. The Injuns captured me, with the rest, when I was a little bit o' a shaver, sca'cely knee-high. The old man was tortured at the fire-stake, an' then we boys was scattered all over. The Delawares tuck me; Sim, he fell to the Senecas, an' Jim to the Shawnees. Tom got away an' went back to Pensylvania.

"Jest think how it 'd be, yourself. I was raised with the Injuns until I 'most fergot I was ever white. I was l'arned to look on the pale-faces as my nat'ral enemies, an' that my duty, when I growed big enough, was to kill 'em on sight. With sech teachin', what else could you expect? You'd 'a' turned out jest the same. They was my people—all I hed. I came to be a Injun, an' fight as the Injuns did, nat'ally.

"I tuck a wife, when I was old enough, an' she hed a lettle boy, an' then a lettle gal. I loved 'em all, fit to kill. I'd 'a' died fer 'em, ruther'n hed one ha'r o' thar heads hurt. But what was the eend? We lived on a island in Erie, by ourselves. I was gone one day, huntin', an' left 'em alone, fer 'twas peace times, an' I didn't think o' harm to them.

"Wal, I kem back, I found my lodge burnt down, an' the three dead—skelped! I found the trail. It was a white man who'd did it. I sot out an' follered it, an' never stopped to rest or eat a bite, until I'd run him to airth. I tuck his skelp—an' the skelps he'd raised from my squaw an' the little ones.

"The gover'ment made a big fuss over it, I was s'pected, an' though they couldn't show any thin' ag'inst me, they tied me up an' whipped me like a dog. Then they cropped my right ear, an' turned me loose. Was I to be a better fri'nd to them then afore? Was I to go to 'em like a dog what licks the hand thet hits him, an' fight my people—the on'y ones thet hed ever treated me like a man?

"No! I swore blood ag'inst all white people, an' until this day, I've kep' my oath. I break it now, fer *her* sake. She's made me more o' a white man then I ever b'lieved I could be. Ef I hed sech as she to keer fer me, I could settle down to a life o' peace an' honest ways."

The renegade paused. His tones as he uttered the last

words were greatly altered from the hard ringing tones with which the brief synopsis of his life had been detailed. A yearning look filled his eyes, as they rested upon the pale countenance of Agnes.

"Well, what matters this to us? You are what you are, and as such we must regard you, even though you have rendered us a great service. But as for our being *friends*—*never*! I would rather, by far, herd with the mangy curs that fill your wigwams, than to lower myself to your level by professing friendship for Girty, the renegade."

Letcher uttered these words in a tone of intense abhorrence. Girty's face flushed hotly, then turned to a ghastly pallor, as he once more turned his gaze upon Agnes.

"An' you—do *you* say the same?" he uttered, speaking with evident difficulty.

"No—but go. I would never meet you again. You have saved us, but I could only think of your dreadful crimes while you were before me. Go—leave us alone," shuddered Agnes.

"Think—on'y think fust what you kin do. Think what a kind word hes did for me, a'ready, an' what more on 'em may do. You kin make jest what you want to out o' me. You kin make me an honest white man ag'in, or you kin turn me into a bigger devil than I ever dreamed of. It's in your hands. Think better on it—do."

Girty spoke in a low but earnest tone, and his eyes dwelt beseechingly upon the countenance of the fair young maiden. But a broad glare of blood seemed to intervene between them, and Agnes clung tremblingly to her father's arm.

"No—go. It sickens me. It is all red—red like blood! The blood of widows' and orphans' dear ones, that you have shed. Go—leave us!"

"You hear?" sternly added Letcher, as he stepped before Agnes. "Go, before I forget what you have done to serve us, in remembrance of your past life. And after to-day, remember we are sworn enemies."

"Very well. So be it, then. You've choosed, an' must bide by it, an' what it brings with it. But you'll regret it—*yas*, you will, shore! I wanted to be your fri'nd—yours an' her'n, but you won't hev it so. You'd rather hev my inimity.

So you shell. I give you ontill sun goes down. Then I'll be a'ter you, an' the best man wins. Do as you please, ontel then. Go to the fort, ef so be you wish. I won't hender ye. But by the blood o' my murdered squaw an' babies, I sw'ar thet I'll kill you an' hev *her*, afore another moon. I won't be a milk-an'-water fool no longer. I'll be as I war afore thi—Girty, the renegade, who hes made more blood flow—white blood—than ary other man in the States."

"There—another word and I'll shoot you like a dog! Go—I say go!" angrily cried Letcher, as he nervously fingered his rifle.

"So I will—but 'member. Ontel the sun sets—no longer," impressively added Girty, as he turned and strode toward the forest.

But he had not made a half-score steps, when two forms sprung from a belt of bushes before him, and rapidly approached. They bore rifles, and these were half-poised, their muzzles bearing full upon his figure.

He paused abruptly, as if bewildered by this new phase. The interview with the recluse and his daughter had evidently greatly unnerved the renegade, and he seemed undecided what move to make, until it was too late.

"Hold! there—not a step further, on your life!" rung out a clear, commanding voice. "Stop! touch that rifle and I'll bore ye with a half-inch bullet!"

This threat was promptly seconded by the grim muzzle staring Girty full in the face, and even then he could see that there was no indecision in the full blue eye that glanced along the short tube. And beside the speaker was another figure, in a similar attitude.

"Who the devil air you—what d'y' mean, anyhow?" snarled Girty, his eyes roving around for some loophole by which he might escape from his perilous situation.

"A friend to all honest men—but I greatly doubt, from what I heard you utter a bit ago, whether you can be placed in that category. It is *my* turn now—who are *you*?"

"It's the renegade—it's George Girty!" cried Letcher, springing forward.

A simultaneous exclamation burst from the lips of the newcomers, and a fierce oath grated through Girty's clenched

teeth. He saw that only prompt and desperate action could free him from the gathering toils.

He sprung to one side, thus carrying his body out of range of the leveled rifles, and flung up his own gun. But he had to deal with men quite as active and prompt as himself.

"Take him, Sam!" shouted the first speaker, as he sprung forward.

The rifle of the renegade was discharged, but without effect, though its contents almost grazed the head of his youngest antagonist, and then, ere he could draw another weapon, the tall man, called Sam, was upon him.

Uttering a bitter, snarling curse, Girty struck out viciously with his clenched fist, and the man reeled back, staggered and confused by its effects. But then the heavy rifle-barrel of the other fell with crushing force upon the bowed head of Girty, felling him to the ground, bleeding and senseless.

"No—stop, Sam. Don't ill-use a helpless man, even though he be a renegade. Bind his hands and feet, though. He's worth more to us alive than dead."

"Jest so—a big feather in our cap, to tote him into the Fort. The men 'll all thank us, an' the wimmen 'll be jest ready to kiss us plum to pieces, fer this. Whoop-ee! heer—raw fer us!" excitedly cried the lank scout, as with dextrous skill his nimble fingers secured Girty with his own belt.

"You say this man is George Girty?" asked the other; a young man dressed in a neat woodsman's garb, somewhat fancifully ornamented, addressing Letcher, at the same time politely doffing his cap to Agnes.

"Yes, he boasted as much to us, himself. But I will tell you the whole thing, and then you can judge whether 'tis true or false," said Letcher.

Then he hastily ran over the events before the reader.

"So—so," thoughtfully muttered the young ranger. "He is a rich prize, indeed! Depend on it, he will never trouble you again. We will take good care that he has no chance to make good his oath, Mr.—"

"Letcher—Francis Letcher, and this is my only child, Agnes."

The young scout bowed politely to Agnes, and there was

an unmistakable glow of admiration in his fine eyes, as he noted her grace and beauty.

"My name is Oscar Jewett, and I act as a scout to the forces at Detroit. This is a brother ranger, Sam Hill."

That lank worthy arose from beside Girty, and gave a short bob of the head, first toward Agnes and then toward her father.

"How d'ye? Glad to see ye—fact!"

As hinted, he was a tall, lank-looking man, garbed in a well-worn suit of buck-skin, carrying the usual weapons of a borderer. His face was thin and smooth-shaven, of a grave, stolid cast, only relieved by the humorous twinkle of the small blue eyes.

His companion was greatly different, in appearance. In figure, of the average height, compactly yet gracefully built, evincing great activity and a good share of muscular strength. In dress a sort of forest dandy, his boyish face still evinced a more than ordinary share of courage and intrepidity. His beardless cheek was smooth and fair almost as that of Agnes, herself, though a slight silken mustache darkened his curved upper lip. His hair was rather long, curling, coal-black as the raven's plumage.

He seemed one little fit for hardships or perilous situations, but his past life contradicted this, even had not his present office told as much. It was not likely that a man holding the position of chief of scouts, would be deficient in either courage or skill.

"Will you not enter the cabin, gentlemen, and rest? While we can then discuss this affair at our ease," said Letcher.

"Thanks; we will do so with pleasure. Since setting out, yesterday morning, from the fort, our fare has been of the scantiest. I must confess to being ravenously hungry, and I know Sam, there, is the same."

"Ain't I? Jest try me—thet's all!" cried Hill, animatedly.

"Our fare is of the plainest, but such as it is—"

"I beg of you, no apologies. Sam, bring that beauty along with you. I don't care to run any risks of his slipping up, this time."

"He looks like a dead man—I fear you have killed him!" shuddered Agnes.

"No—he is only stunned, though I did strike him pretty hard. He will come to in a little while."

The two men, preceded by Agnes, turned and entered the house. Sam Hill grasped the still insensible renegade by the collar, and unceremoniously dragged him up to the doorstep, where he crouched down beside him, as though fearful lest the cunning renegade should still, by some strange means, escape from their hands. The lank scout mentally swore that if so, 'twould be from no fault of his.

CHAPTER V.

FOILED.

"You have been scouting, Mr. Jewett," observed Letcher, as they seated themselves, while Agnes bustled around to prepare a hasty meal.

"Well, yes, after a measure. We have been out warning the settlers that war has been declared with Great Britain, and that the Indians are up to their old tricks once more. We were on our return as we came by here. Seeing fresh Indian signs hard by, we crept up to feel our way, when a few words uttered by that wretch caught my ear. I believed he was an enemy, and so blocked him, as you know."

While speaking, the eyes of the young ranger were oftener fixed upon the lithe, graceful figure of Agnes, as she glided to and fro, than aught else, and she, too, stole more than one shy glance at this forest Adonis. But there seemed to be something in his dark eyes that strangely confused her, for her head drooped, and a soft flush crimsoned her cheek.

"Say, Oscar, this imp hes woke up," called out Sam Hill, "Looks jest 's though he'd lost somethin' an' couldn't find it."

Letcher and Jewett stepped to the door, and glanced at the renegade. His form was propped in a sitting attitude against the house, and before him crouched the lank ranger.

As Girty heard the footsteps, he turned his head so that he could see the two men, and a wild glare filled his blood-shot eyes. His face became frightfully distorted, and he gnashed his teeth like a maddened wolf.

"Cuss you—cuss you fer a sneakin' liar!" he snarled darting a fiery, vindictive glance at the recluse. "This is what I saved ye fer, is it? This is how you keep your word! Ah! ef I was on'y free fer a minnit—jest one minnit—I wouldn't ax any more. I'd t'ar your black heart out o' your body!"

"I did not raise a hand against you," coldly uttered Letcher.

"But ye told my name—it's jest the same. But I'll be even with ye yit, I sw'ar I will. I'll kill you—I'll put a thousand deaths in one, an' make ye wish you'd niver bin born. You an' *her*, too, now. I hate her like I do you, ca'se she's *your* da'ter. I'll—"

"Stop his foul mouth, Sam," cried Oscar.

"No—let him rave. He can do no harm," contemptuously said Letcher.

"Yas, let me tell him what I think o' him, then do as you please 'th me. I saved his life—bigger fool me for doin' it!—an' this is how he pays me! But lis'en. I niver yit swore a oath that I didn't keep, cl'ar through. I niver yit hed a grudge that I didn't wipe out, sooner or later. I will *this* one, too. You fellers think you've got me safe but don't b'lieve it. I'll git free—I know it, I'm *boun'* to. I couldn't go under ontel I've paid him up."

"But your life is at our mercy, man. What is to hinder us from shooting you now, and thus break all hope of your escaping?"

"Beca'se you'd ruther take me to Detroit a pris'ner. You'll try it, but I'll fool ye. I tell ye I'll hev revenge on *him*. I'll kill him—I'll take the gal, an' she shell be my squaw—"

"Stop! utter another word like that and I'll gag you!" hotly cried Jewett, as Agnes uttered a cry of alarm.

"I've said it all—said it an' swore it, too. Mind me—it'll come true—every word on it," coolly added Girty; then his head sunk upon his chest, and he gazed fixedly upon the forest beyond.

"Mr. Letcher," said Oscar, as they turned from the door "you will go with us to the Post?"

"I dare not, in the daytime. I fear for *her*. I thought I would wait here until night, and then try it by water. I think they left my canoe."

"It might be better. The forest is full of the red rascals, and a lady would be sadly out of place there. But if you will risk it, you can depend upon our assistance."

"No, I will wait. But come, sit up, help yourselves freely. I will go and see if they left my boat."

"I'll take my grub out here, Oscar, ef it's all the same. I don't like to lose sight o' this imp, an' he'd p'ison the house ef we brung him inside. He would *so*!" said Sam.

In a few moments Letcher returned, wearing an uneasy expression upon his countenance. He stated that his canoe had disappeared, no doubt having been carried off by the party of Delawares whom Girty had disappointed of their coveted prey.

"That settles it, then. Miss Agnes can not make so long and difficult a journey through the forest. It would kill her. You must wait here until I can return with a party from the fort. By brisk traveling we can get back here by daybreak, if not before. You say he ordered the Indians off, so *they* will not return, and 'tis not likely that a second party will chance by this place so soon. I do not think the danger will be very great," thoughtfully observed Jewett.

"Wal, ef we're to do all thet, 'pears to me we'd better be travelin'. It's a long road, an' we hev *him* to take keer of," interrupted Hill.

"You're right, Sam. Well, then, it is fully understood? You are to await us here?"

"Yes, it is best so, I think. I would not ask this trouble of you, only for *her*. She is all that is left me, now!" uttered Letcher, in an agitated tone.

"A pleasure, not a trouble, I assure you," eagerly added Oscar. "But you had better keep the cabin closed, and do not let any thing throw you off your guard. Depend on it, we will not fail you."

"How'll we manidge the imp, Oscar?"

"Untie his feet and make him walk. He can not escape us."

Chuckling grimly, the lank scout took the strap thus loosened and looped it around Girty's neck, holding fast to one end. In obedience to a significant jerk, the renegade rose to his feet, and cast a glance of defiance upon his captors.

"No crooked looks, *ef* you please, mister. 'Tain't good manners—durned *ef* 'tis. Must break yourself o' the habit. Git hurt, some time, mebbe, *ef* ye don't."

"'Member what I told ye!" snarled Girty, casting a venomous glance at the recluse.

"I will remember it longer than *you* will, I hope—for a very good reason," retorted Letcher, significantly.

The two scouts renewed their pledge, and then strode away, driving their prisoner before them. As they entered the forest, Oscar turned and waved his hand toward the cabin, while a pleased smile lighted up his handsome countenance as the salute was returned by Agnes and her father.

"A fine couple! She's almost an angel!" muttered Jewett, half-unconsciously.

"I don't know 'bout *thet*, Oscar, but I *do* know *thet* she gits up all-fired nice *grub*. I'd like to hev her fer a cook all the time. I would *so*!" was the unsentimental reply of Hill.

"P'shaw! that's a nice way to speak of a lady, Sam," rather touchily said Jewett.

"Sensibler'n what *you* said 'bout angels an' sech like, anyhow."

Girty strode on doggedly, though at a fair pace, in spite of his bruised limb, which troubled him somewhat. But he knew that his captors were not men to stand on trifles, and that they would not hesitate about using harsher measures, should he prove obstinate.

Still he did not give up hopes of eluding them. As he had said he firmly believed that he would escape this peril, and live to be revenged upon the man who had delivered him up to a shameful death, after being preserved from almost certain destruction by his interference.

Toward that one end, then, his every thought was turned. But it seemed a fruitless hope. His captors were keenly upon the alert, and Sam Hill watched him as closely as a cat watches a mouse.

In one hand he held the leather belt, that encircled the ren-

egade's throat, and Jewett kept an eye upon his motions, while gliding along a little to one side. In this manner they threaded the forest for over an hour, without any event worthy of note.

They were now some little distance from the lake shore and the forest was of a more open nature, with less dense undergrowth. Oscar Jewett abruptly paused, with a low exclamation.

"What's up now?" muttered Hill, tightening his grip upon the belt and bringing Girty to an abrupt standstill.

"Indian sign—fresh and plenty of it."

"Thet's so—made not more'n a hour ago, nuther," grunted Sam, as he keenly scrutinized the ground, where were the unmistakable imprints of numerous moccasined feet.

The trail lay at almost right angles with the course they were pursuing, as the Indians had seemingly left the lake directly behind them. The party was evidently a large one, though having passed in single file.

The two scouts interchanged significant glances. Girty observed these, and laughed; a low but triumphant chuckle. There was exultation in his voice, as he spoke:

"They're Delawares—my people. How long do ye think ye kin keep out o' thar hands?"

"What in thunder tickles *your* fancy, so pesky much—*say*?" testily demanded Sam Hill. "S'pose we *do* fall in 'th them, what use 'll it be to *you*, I'd like to know? They'll never do *you* no good—be sure o' thet. Ain't it so, Oscar?"

"Yes. Keep close to him and be ready to strike. If we have to run for it, make sure work of him, first. If we can not manage to take him in alive, we'll leave him so he'll do us no more mischief, at any rate."

"What d'y' mean be thet?" sullenly demanded Girty.

"You are very dull of comprehension, my good fellow. I mean just this. We'll take you into the fort, if two men can do it. But if not—if your friends make us any trouble, it will be so much the worse for you. At the first sign of risk, down you go. That moment you die," sternly added the young scout.

Girty did not make any reply to this threat, but subsided into sullen silence. He saw that his feeling of exultation

had been premature, or at least its expression ill-timed, and that it had only wrought him ill, by deepening the resolution of his captors.

"Sam," added Oscar, "do you keep your eyes upon him now, more closely than ever. Leave me to attend to the rest. I'll go ahead and if we are likely to have trouble, will give you warning in time for you to finish him. You know the signals—be on the look-out for them."

Jewett, after carefully inspecting the condition of his rifle, glided forward and maintained a lead of a few yards. After him came Sam Hill, driving Girty as before.

"Now mind ye, my fine feller," continued the lank scout. "No foolishin', fer I won't stand it. You jest move on decently, an' don't try to smash *every* stick that we chaine to pass 'ithin sight o', with them mud scows o' your'n. I'm nat'ally good-natured, but don't ye make me mad—ef you do, you'll be mighty apt to git *hurt*. You will *so*!"

Under the circumstances, Girty could do no less than obey his guard, for already had he felt the sharp point of Sam's knife, and he knew that an exhibition of obstinacy might call forth such an application as would effectually put an end to his career.

The fears of the two scouts appeared to be without foundation, for they progressed rapidly, without hearing or seeing any thing further of their enemies. As their spirits rose, that of their captive sunk correspondingly, for every moment was carrying him nearer to his enemies, and lessening the chances of his meeting with friends.

When the sun went down, nearly half the long journey was accomplished, and the brother scouts were congratulating each other upon their good fortune. But they were speedily given evidence that they had not left all danger behind them, as they had fondly hoped.

They had decided not to pause for either food or rest, until at their journey's end, fully appreciating the importance of running no unnecessary risk, while having in charge a prisoner of such importance. And, despite Girty's growlings, for he in reality suffered acutely from his injured leg, they pressed rapidly on.

They were only a short distance from the lake shore, and

Jewett, as usual, was a little ways in advance. He abruptly paused and crouched down behind a clump of bushes, gazing intently before him.

Sam Hill noted this action, and promptly drew his knife holding it in readiness for an instant blow. But the time for that had not yet come.

"Bring him along, Sam," whispered Oscar, in a tone barely audible to his comrade. "I fear there's breakers ahead!"

The clump of bushes surmounted a little knoll, and commanded a tolerably fair view for a little distance along the lake shore. Not far from the water's edge, yet nearly a quarter of a mile ahead of our friends, a faint, ruddy glow was visible, that could only be produced by a campfire built in the forest.

"Mebbe it's some o' the other boys, who was sent out like we was," suggested Sam.

"Hardly. They know the savages too well. More like it's a camp of Indians, though why they encamp this early, while on the war-path, puzzles me. It's not their nature," muttered Jewett.

"Wal, what do you mean to do now?"

"I must go and learn what it means. It won't do to run any unnecessary risks. You stay here and keep him safe. If he ventures to cry out, kill him. I'd rather lose a hand than have him escape us now."

"No danger o' thet. I hain't *quite* a fool, yit. But better go, ef thet's the trail. We hain't got much daylight to burn."

"I will. You can see the shore yonder, opposite the light. If it's any of our boys, I'll go there and show a light, so that we won't lose time. You can bring him safe that far, alone. If it is a red-skin fire, as I more than half believe, I will find out the best way to pass them, and meet you here. But mind him; he's a cunning rascal, and may be at some of his tricks."

"Don't fret 'bout me. I kin manidge the imp. Ef he breathes louder'n a whisper, rip goes my sticker clean through his gizzard. Make haste as quick as you kin now."

Jewett turned and glided away into the forest, displaying a rare degree of skill in so silently threading the tangled

woods. From infancy the wilderness had been his home, and he had attained a point of proficiency in woodcraft exceedingly rare in one so youthful.

A few minutes carried him over the greater portion of the distance, and then he proceeded with more care. Already he could distinguish the glow of the firelight, and even fancied he could hear the low hum of voices in conversation, above the sighing of the wind among the treetops.

Now prostrate upon the ground, Jewett slowly crawled forward, his progress as silent and wary as that of a serpent, and finally he gained a point from whence he could command a fair view of the camp-ground, as he crouched low down behind a thick scrubby bush. Through the leafy twigs he peered out upon the wild scene spread before his eyes.

Oscar saw that his suspicions were realized; that this was indeed the camp-fire of a war-party of Indians. And then his eyes eagerly drank in the details of the scene.

The fire was built in a small glade, surrounded by bushes and trees. Through a small opening in these, the young scout had fortunately obtained a glimpse of it.

Surrounding this small fire, were fully a score of half-naked forms, painted with true savage idea of beauty, with bright-colored dyes. A glance sufficed to tell Jewett that he beheld a war-party of Delawares.

He saw, too, that they had been engaged in strife, whose severity was evidenced by more than one wound, rudely bandaged with leaves. And, here and there, dangling from the wampum girdles, he noted a number of still gory scalps, whose long, fine hair, or short, curling locks of a light hue, told but too plainly that they had recently adorned the heads of white people: men, women and babes.

Several of the party seemed engaged in an animated and not over amicable discussion, though carried on in such low tones that Oscar, though a master of the dialect, could not at first divine the cause of dispute. But he speedily learned it, and the sight filled his heart with horror and indignation.

One of the savages darted from the circle and disappeared amidst a clump of bushes, reappearing in a few moments, dragging with him another figure. It was slight and frail, apparently terror-stricken.

A cry rose to Jewett's lips, as he distinguished the face and figure of a young white girl. His rifle rose to his cheek, but then was lowered, undischarged.

He was helpless—he could do nothing. To interfere now would only result in certain destruction, both to himself and friend, involving, as well, the loss of their prisoner. He could only wait, hoping for something to turn up that would enable him to strike a blow for the stranger maiden, with some faint hope of a good result.

The savage rudely dragged the girl up to where the others stood, and uttered a few sharp words. Then, quick as thought, there came a glittering flash—a dull, sickening *thud*, followed by a heavy fall upon the earth!

Oscar uttered an involuntary cry of horror, but fortunately for him, this was drowned by a hoarse yell from one of the Indians; a yell of angry rage. And for a brief interval there seemed a prospect for a pitched battle among the dusky demons.

But the one who had so summarily settled the dispute between the rival warriors, was their chief, and at a word from his lips, the others ranged beside him, confronting the two disappointed braves. This quelled the mutiny, and the chief coolly appropriated the scalp of the murdered girl to himself, probably regarding it as his fee for acting as judge.

All this transpired so quickly that the young scout could not have interposed, had he been so foolhardy. Ere he comprehended the real purport of the chief's speech, the bloody deed was consummated.

Though he felt an almost uncontrollable desire to avenge the ill-fated maiden, Oscar subdued his feelings, remembering that he owed a duty to the living, greater than that to the dead, who were already beyond earthly aid. He saw there were no more captives, and felt that his only course was to retreat as quickly as possible from his perilous position, where a chance glance might at any moment discover him.

Slowly and cautiously, by almost imperceptible degrees, Oscar worked his way backward from the bush that had afforded him shelter, bending toward the lake shore, until the camp-fire was hidden from his view. The broad expanse of water lay before him.

Upon the bank he noted the dusky outlines of several canoes, of different sizes, but he dared not attempt stealing them. Then arising, he glided rapidly away in the gloom, heading toward the spot where he had left his comrade in charge of the captive renegade.

His breath came quick and hard, and his entire frame quivered with horror, as he recalled the fiendish murder he had so lately witnessed. It seemed as though he was in a manner guilty of the maiden's death, for not having dared all in a desperate attempt to save her.

In a few minutes Jewett neared the spot where he had left Sam Hill, and pausing, he uttered the signal—a low whistle, ending in a peculiar quaver, that was one of the calls in common use among the American scouts. To Oscar's surprise, there came no answer to this.

Again he uttered the signal, but naught answered him. All was still, save the never-ending murmur of the breeze playing through the lofty treetops.

A feeling of wondering alarm seized upon the young ranger. Why this strange and continued silence? Surely he had not mistaken the spot!

"No—it's the place. Then what is the matter? Can he have left it? Can there have been other Indians by here, so close as to drive him away? Or can it be—"

At this thought Jewett uttered a low cry and darted forward. He half feared that the cunning renegade had indeed kept his boast, and by some means succeeded in effecting an escape.

And yet this seemed impossible, bound as he was, and in the custody of a trusty scout, wary and keen-witted. And Sam Hill full well knew the importance of his captive, and would endanger his safety by no foolish negligence.

Jewett sprung forward and stood beside the clump of bushes, where he had left his loved comrade. As he did so, a cry of horror and anguish burst from his lips, and he reeled back, sick at heart.

The moon shone down brightly, and through a rift in the treetops, flooded the spot with a clear light. It revealed a ghastly scene.

A dead man lay there, his white, ghastly face upturned,

his staring eyes filled with a look of horror and deadly anguish. The gory breast and throat showed how he came by his end. A knife thrust to the heart, another slash that had almost severed the head from its trunk. And the silvery light revealed the gory skull, from which had been torn the scalp.

It was the body of honest Sam Hill, dead and scalped. And George Girty, the renegade, was missing!

He had indeed made his boast good!

CHAPTER VI.

FLIGHT.

SAM HILL and George Girty crouched there under shelter of the bush, side by side, as Oscar Jewett left them to learn the meaning of the forest camp-fire. The gaze of both men was riveted upon the ruddy light.

Sam held a drawn knife in one hand, while the other gripped the shoulder of the renegade, ready to fulfill his threat, and Girty was seemingly resigned to his fate, as though confident that an attempt at escape could only result in his own ill.

But for all that, he was not idle, nor had he been so cowed as his captors believed, for hours past. During all that time, but more especially since the sun set, and the gray shades of night settled down upon the earth, he had been busy, paving the way for his escape.

He was a cunning man, and not one to ruin himself by precipitate action. But now, as Oscar departed, he felt that the time had come for him to put his project into execution, if ever.

His arms had been bound with the stout leathern strap that formerly supported his powder-horn and bullet-pouch by his side. This confined his elbows, and then twined around until it was tied at his wrists, thus forming bonds seemingly impossible for him to remove, unaided.

But he knew the strap, and worked accordingly. As he walked along, he brought to bear a gradual strain upon it at his elbows, and finally felt his perseverance rewarded by the pliable, greased strap slipping until it became quite loose.

Then he worked in the same manner upon his wrists, so dextrously that though beneath the very eye of Sam Hill, his actions were not suspected. Thus, when the pause was made as recorded, at the bush, he was nearly ready for action.

Dextrously he completed his work. He made a sudden change in his position, and at the same time strained desperately upon his bands.

He felt the knot slip, and then the strap slowly settled down over his wrists. This *ruse* had prevented Sam from noting the sudden exertion, and now a slight motion would free his hands entirely.

"Look here, *you!*" muttered Hill, giving his captive a slight shake by way of emphasis. "Mind now—quit your durned foolin', keep still, or I'll hurt ye, now."

The shake had entirely freed Girty, and as he closely clenched his hands, he uttered in a low tone:

"I didn't mean it—my knee slipped. But look! ain't that the light he said he'd show?"

"Whar—I don't see it?" and as he spoke, Hill leaned eagerly forward.

"*H-a-ah!*"

A fierce, snarling cry broke from Girty's lips, as he flung his arms around and dealt the incautious scout a double blow full upon the neck, dashing him forward through the bush. The bared knife fell from his nerveless grasp, and lay in the limpid moonlight, shining like a bar of silver.

One hand of the renegade clutched the throat of his late captor, while with the other he secured the weapon. And then ensued a struggle for life or death, brief, though fierce and desperate.

Sam Hill, rallying from the stupefying blow, exerted his strength to free his throat from the choking grasp, rolling quickly over upon his back. His bony fists struck fiercely up at the hideous face of the maddened renegade, but all was in vain.

The glittering weapon uprose, and then swiftly shot down.

fairly over the ill-fated scout's heart, sinking to the very hilt with the force of the revengeful blow.

A gurgling gasp broke from his lips, and his grasp relaxed. One great quiver of the muscular frame was all. He was dead!

But the infuriated renegade was not content with this. The heavy blade fell once more, and almost severed the dead man's head from his body.

Then the scalp was torn off, and George Girty sprung to his feet, a free man once more! As he swung the reeking trophy aloft, he could scarce refrain from uttering a shrill yell of exultation, but prudence restrained him. He knew not but what the camp-fire was built by whites, and consequently enemies to him.

Stooping, Girty recovered the weapons and ammunition of his victim, and then with a fiendish chuckle, turned and glided away from the spot of death. He kept a keen look-out for the returning scout, as he glided toward the light, in case the fire had been built by Indians, and had he met Oscar Jewett, there would have been another murder committed that night.

But, as already shown, they did not meet. The young scout had come almost directly along the lake shore, while Girty very nearly followed the same route along which Jewett had passed while reconnoitering.

Thus it came that Oscar was greeted with such a tragic sight. And the blow was very bitter to him, for he had learned to love the rude, uncouth, but kind and true-hearted scout, Sam Hill.

Perhaps it was fortunate that a startling interruption came just then, for it aroused the young scout to a sense of his own peril, and the duty that still lay before him. It came in a quick, wild yell, or series of yells, from behind him, evidently from the Indian camp.

Oscar started as though awakened from a horrible nightmare. He knew right well what had caused this outcry. Girty had no doubt reached the spot, and warned the savages of the proximity of a foe.

"Poor Sam!" muttered Jewett, in a broken tone. "I must leave you, but I swear revenge for this—I will have it, or lay down my own life in the attempt!"

For a moment he deliberated, undecided what course to pursue. He knew that Girty would spare no pains to effect either his capture or death, and that every moment he remained there, but rendered his peril the greater.

"I can leave them, easily enough," he muttered, in an undecided tone. "But that is not all. *He* heard our plans and will try to foil them. If I go on to the Post, can we return in time to do any good? No—that will never do! They depend upon me—I will not fail them."

A plan, bold and daring, yet presenting a fair prospect of success, was shaping itself in the young ranger's mind, while still alert to the threatening danger. The yells of the Indians had ceased, and the forest was still, seemingly deserted by all human life, but Oscar was not deceived by this. He knew that his foes, led by George Girty, were searching for him.

"I'll do it—it's the best plan. She can never make the trip on land," suddenly resolved Jewett, and then he set about carrying out his plan.

He turned and glided into the woods, rapidly leaving the lake shore behind him, exerting his utmost skill to avoid making a noise that might possibly betray him to his bloodthirsty foes. And for fully half a mile he maintained an almost direct line, though gradually bearing to the left.

Then as he gained the distance he believed sufficient, Oscar turned and ran along rapidly, as though about to pass the encampment where he had witnessed the deed of blood but a short time previously.

Though the distance traversed was over two miles, it was accomplished in half an hour, and Oscar found himself at the motte's edge, not many yards from where had flickered the light of the camp-fire. This was no longer visible, doubtless having been extinguished upon Girty's giving the alarm.

"It's neck or nothing," muttered the ranger. "If they've left a guard there, my cake's dough!"

Oscar slung the rifle over his shoulder, in a manner that, even should he enter the water deep enough for swimming, the lock would not become dampened, and then placing a bared knife between his jaws, he glided down and entered the water. It was shallow here, and he was forced to crawl

along nearly at the outside edge of the shadow cast by the tree-tops.

He necessarily progressed quite slowly, but finally reached the group of canoes, the object of his venture. As yet no alarm had been given, and the ranger's hopes rose proportionally as he advanced.

"Good! the paddles are all here! Now if I can only get them all loose and started out upon the lake, I don't care how soon they see me."

In the shelter afforded by the four boats, Jewett could work with greater speed, and in a few moments had severed their fastenings, and gently floated the boats out into deeper water though still within the line of shade. A moment sufficed to connect them together, and then choosing one of the smaller canoes, the young ranger cautiously drew himself into it, and seized the paddle.

Then with a strong sweep, he darted out into the clear moonlight, towing his prizes after him. The bold *ruse* bade fair to be a success, for thus far no unusual sound broke the forest stillness.

But then came a wild, shrill yell, closely followed by a sharp rifle-crack, telling Oscar that he was discovered. The bullet spitefully cut the water a few feet to one side of the ranger, having been discharged too hastily for accurate aim.

And then the cry was taken up and echoed back from a score of throats, until it seemed as though the forest was fairly alive with fiends let loose from Pandemonium. Shot after shot came hissing over the water, but the bold scout sat erect, plying the paddle with strong, steady sweeps, each moment carrying him further away from his enemies.

A taunting laugh broke from Oscar's lips, who recognized the voice of George Girty urging on his red allies. And turning, the young ranger waved his paddle toward the shore in triumphant derision.

He heard a number of quick splashes in the water, and a peculiar smile curled his lip as he again turned and calculated the distance he had passed over. He saw that he was now safe from any rifle-shots, when fired by so uncertain a light.

"One blow—I have not time for more," he muttered, as

his keen eye noted a number of small blackish dots upon the lake's bosom behind him. "But I must strike one blow for poor Sam—the first one of a long and heavy reckoning. If *that* devil would only come! But he knows better."

Jewett was too cunning to leave off paddling entirely, for he knew that, should he do so, the swimmers would either attempt to surround him, when their numbers would prove troublesome, or else back out altogether, before he had a chance to strike his contemplated blow. But while he plied his paddles as though in steady flight, he really retarded the canoe, so that a strong swimmer could easily overtake it.

A backward glance showed him that the foremost savages were near enough for his purpose, and seizing his rifle, he turned and leveled it.

The motion seemed a signal for a general disappearance of the black dots, by diving, on the part of his pursuers, but with ready weapon, Oscar waited. He knew that a few moments would suffice. The savages must rise to the surface for breath.

Then came a bright flash—a choking cry, as the head aimed at sunk beneath the surface, to rise no more a living warrior. The aim of the young ranger had been as accurate as it had been quick.

Once more Jewett seized his paddle, and worked with great energy. A few minutes of this, and he paused once more, drawing his knife and slitting the bark canoes, so that they would speedily fill and sink.

Then casting them loose, he once more sped on. The shore now looked faint and indistinct, and believing he had passed beyond the vision of his enemies, Oscar turned and paddled swiftly up the lake, heading toward the lone cabin where the recluse and his daughter had promised to await his coming.

Oscar's plans were decided from this reasoning. He knew that a man like Girty would never forget the part Letcher had taken in his capture, and would know no rest until he had made good his bitter oath of revenge.

Then, unless he could reach the cabin before the renegade, the two isolated whites would undoubtedly fall victims to Girty's vengeance, as they had promised to await the return.

of a party from the fort, not dreaming it possible that the renegade could effect an escape. To delay the red-skins, as well as to facilitate his own progress, Oscar had stolen the canoes.

Even during the brief interval that he had been in Agnes' company, the young ranger had conceived a strong respect and feeling of admiration for her. It was not love, but a consideration that very little would force into that sentiment. And now he resolved to peril his own life, rather than she should come to harm.

All these events had consumed time in their execution, and Jewett saw with increasing anxiety that the night was rapidly waning. That the flight would be one of great peril, he could not doubt, and he dreaded its result, for while upon the lake in open day, they would form a mark that could scarcely help but attract the attention of enemies.

He knew, too, that Girty would be upon the watch, knowing as he must that the fugitives would travel by water, for Agnes could ill stand a forced march through the rough and tangled wilderness.

These reflections agitated the young scout's mind, and under this influence he plied the paddle with desperate vigor, sending the light birchen craft through, or seemingly *over* the water, with marvelous speed. Nor did he relax his strenuous exertions until the hills that overshadowed the lone cabin loomed up before him.

As the canoe touched the strand, he sprung lightly out and drew the prow upon the sand. Then he hastened toward the cabin, that an anxious glance showed him was still standing.

Pausing beside a tree, he uttered a shrill whistle, and then called out. To his great joy, an answering voice came to his ears from the cabin.

"Who is it that calls?"

"I—Oscar Jewett, Mr. Letcher. Thank God you are safe!" fervently cried the ranger, as he bounded forward.

The door opened to admit him, and then was closed and barred. All was dark within, but the strong hand of the recluse grasped his with a warm pressure.

"Thank God you have returned safely. This has been a

long, long, dreary night for us. It seems an age since you left, though you have returned earlier than you said. Have you brought a boat?"

"Yes—but I come alone. I have not been to the fort."

"Alone—not been to the fort?" echoed Letcher, in astonishment. "Then where is the renegade? Surely you did not trust him to the care of only one man?"

"The devil helps him now, it seems. Girty is free—he escaped," moodily responded Oscar.

"What! You let him escape—you did not kill him first?"

"Listen, Mr. Letcher, before you blame me. We did all that men could do, and God knows that poor Sam has suffered severely enough, without *your* blame being added," and then Jewett proceeded to sketch a brief outline of that night's occurrences.

"You were not to blame, but I almost wish I had killed him when I had the power," gloomily said the recluse. "I greatly fear we have not seen the last of this devil. He will not forget me soon, and no doubt will endeavor to fulfill his threat. Were I alone, I would care little, but I have *her* to guard and watch over, besides."

"I will help you defend her, with my life," said Oscar, earnestly. "But we had better be moving. That rascal will make all haste here in order to get you into his power, though I do not think he will look for my coming here so soon. I believe I put them on a wrong scent."

"The canoe is large enough for us three?"

"Yes, I had an eye to that, when I destroyed the others. You had better strike a light, so as to see what things to pack up. We will need food before the fort is gained, and you have some small articles you wish to save, I suppose."

The three friends worked briskly, and in a few minutes were ready to enter upon their desperate venture. Then they abandoned the cabin and hastened to the canoe.

They entered this and pushed out from the shore. Oscar took his place in the stern, with Agnes facing him, while Letcher occupied the bow. Jewett's foresight had furnished the canoe with extra paddles, when he destroyed the other boats, in case one should break.

"It must be very near morning," observed Agnes, in a low, guarded tone, as they began gliding rapidly over the tranquil bosom of the lake.

"So it is. An hour at the most, and it will be light. I fear we will have a dangerous trip of it. You are not afraid?"

"No—not much. I know father will not suffer me to fall into that bad man's power alive, if the worst comes," calmly returned the maiden.

"It might be better so, though I pray it may never come to that. You shall not come to harm so long as I can lift an arm in your defense," earnestly whispered Oscar.

"You are very kind—every stranger would not run this risk for those who have no claim upon him. We will never forget it while life lasts," added Agnes, in a tone that trembled slightly.

"Thank you—I would do far more than this for you—for any lady. It is only my duty. I will be more than rewarded if you continue to look upon and regard me as a friend."

"That I will—I could do no less. But I fear the worst. A strange and horrible dread weighs down my heart. Do you believe in premonitions?"

"Well, no—I can't say that I do."

"I do. And ever since this morning I have felt ill at ease. It seems impressed upon me that there is a great peril or calamity in store for me. I do not believe that I will ever behold the setting of the sun again!"

The words of the maiden were incoherent and uneven, and appeared uttered more to herself than to Oscar. And despite his strong good sense, the young ranger felt a shuddering dread possess his spirits, as though this was a prophecy destined to be terribly fulfilled.

"The feeling is but natural, Miss Agnes," he uttered in a melancholy tone, though still speaking guardedly. "It springs from the dangers you have been exposed to this day—or rather yesterday. Believe me, 'twill soon wear off, and you will be the first one to laugh at your ill-founded presentiment, ere to-day is past."

"I hope so—I pray that your words may be true, but I can not drive the dread away, try hard as I may."

During this conversation, the two paddles had been steadily wielded, and the light canoe glided over the water like a very thing of life. Already a goodly distance had been traversed, since leaving the lone cabin.

The moon had long since sunk to rest, but the stars shone brilliantly, and quite an extensive view could be had of the lake's surface. Morning was now close at hand, and the two men bent vigorously to their work, in silence, knowing that their lives might depend upon the progress they made before the sun arose.

"Ha! listen!" muttered Oscar, bending his head, and ceasing to paddle.

Barely distinguishable, there came to their ears, borne upon the favoring breeze, a faint yell, seemingly from the land they had left behind them. A significant glance passed between the fugitives.

"It is the Indians—they are at the cabin," uttered Letcher, in a strained voice.

"Yes, you are right. Well, better there than here. They're far behind us, and, with God's help, we will keep them there," cheerily observed Oscar.

"But may not they follow us?" anxiously murmured the maiden.

"Let them—with the start we have, it would sadly trouble them to keep us in view. No, if they are all we have to fear, I feel as safe here as I would be in Detroit itself."

"Then you fear others?"

"A good scout never allows himself to become foolhardy," evasively replied Jewett. "In war time he acts and moves as though every bush and tree concealed a lurking foe. But there may be others to dread. I hope not, but such may be the case. You know Girty overheard our plans. He knows that I escaped with the canoes, and that I would either hasten to the fort for assistance, or would keep on to your house. He knows, too, that we will attempt to reach safety by water for your daughter's sake. Then, reasoning thus, he may send a party to the river, so as to stop a boat going either way. It is what I would do, were I in his place, and he is a scout, there is no denying that, scoundrel as the rene-

THE FOE.

"Look!" again cried Agnes. "Is that the sun rising yonder?" as she pointed to a bright and gradually increasing glow somewhat to the left of their rear.

"No—it is a fire! The Indians have set fire to the house," replied Oscar, after a quick glance. "It is too far to the north. A curve in the shore deceives you."

The canoe still sped on, under the powerful impulse given the two paddles. All now felt too much anxiety to converse, and the minutes rolled on, while the gray light in the east heralded the coming day.

This was a sight most unwelcome to the fugitives, as they well knew that their greatest safety now lay in darkness. They had not yet traversed half the distance to the river, and felt that their peril was momentarily increasing.

"Ha! look there!" abruptly cried Letcher, in an agitated tone, pointing before him. "Your eyes are sharper than mine, Jewett. What are those? canoes?"

"Yes—two of them—and full of men at that!" hoarsely muttered Oscar, after a moment's scrutiny of the objects indicated. "Quick! they may not have seen us yet. To the shore! If they catch sight of us, we are indeed lost!"

The bow of the canoe was instantly turned toward the shore, and the greatest powers of the two men put into play. But the distance was considerable, as they had not deemed prudent to pass where the sound of their paddles might betray them to a watchful enemy upon the shore.

"Too late—they see us! My God! all is lost!" groaned Letcher, as a faint yell came to their ears, and the canoes were seen turning toward the fugitives, their paddles flashing quickly in the rapidly-increasing light.

"No—don't stop. It's our only chance. We must take to the woods and try to throw them off the scent. Luckily I know the lay of the ground well. I think we will have time for it. Paddle, man—pull for your life and for *her* life, hurriedly cried Jewett, as he bent to his work until the tough ashen paddle bent and strained beneath the pressure.

"Jump out—quick," he added, as the canoe touched land. "Hand me the provisions; we may need them. Help her and follow me closely."

Oscar gave one quick glance around him, and then entered the forest, at a half-run. Agnes required but little assistance, for she was in good health, and accustomed to out-door exercise, while the vindictive yells of the nearing savages added wings to her feet.

Oscar only entered the woods for a short distance, before turning abruptly to the left, though that course brought him nearer the enemy, with every step. But, fortunately, Letcher was too greatly agitated with fears for his child's safety, to note this, else he might have demurred, and hesitation now would prove fatal.

"We can not keep this up clear to the fort," he uttered despondingly. "Agnes would die!"

"I don't intend it. We must use strategy, and if you trust in me, I will ~~save~~ her yet."

"I will—I will."

A few hundred yards brought them to a slight rise in the land, running almost parallel with the lake shore, and over this ridge Oscar darted. At its base ran a broad but shallow creek, flowing over a pebbly bottom.

Into this Jewett sprung, and, turning, caught Agnes in his arms, carrying her like a baby. Then he turned *up-stream*, thus almost retracing their steps, and going *from* the fort, instead of toward it, as one would naturally suppose he would do.

"You mistake—this is the wrong way!" cried Letcher, in dismay.

"Don't talk—come on. It is the only thing that can save us now. Those devils would overtake us before we ran a mile, should we keep on. Trust in me—I know what I am doing," rather impatiently uttered Oscar.

Letcher yielded to this decisive tone and manner, and followed close in his young friend's footsteps. The water, flowing on, effectually obliterated what faint traces were left by their moccasined feet.

Jewett kept on with unflagging vigor, for nearly a half-mile, holding Agnes in his sturdy arms above the water, without any apparent effort. The aspect of the country grew more broken, and at times the creek-banks were **shoulder high**.

Oscar paused near the base of a slight hill, whose face, toward the stream, was broken and rocky, studded here and there by a scrubby bush, or a mass of clinging creepers. Here the young scout paused and turned toward the recluse, saying :

"We are at the place I spoke of, now. Step in my tracks, and be careful you leave no traces behind you."

He emerged from the water, and using the thickly scattered stones for his feet to rest upon, advanced to the foot of the hill. Gently lowering Agnes to the ground, he cautiously parted a leafy screen of bushes, thickly matted with vines and creepers, revealing a small, dark opening in the hill-side.

"It is a dark and cheerless place," he added, as Agnes involuntarily shrunk back, "but 'tis better than falling into *their* power. You will be safe here as long as you exercise common prudence."

"But I don't understand you," said Letcher, anxiously eyeing the refuge. "Are we to stay here until they give up the search for us?"

"You admit that Miss Agnes could never stand a forced march to the fort?"

"Yes—'twould be impossible."

"And we can not hope to fight them, with her in charge—those we saw in the canoes?"

"No—you surely know that. They were nearly a dozen of them."

"Fully that. Well, then, I must try to get to the fort, and return with help. You can remain here in safety, for they will not be able to follow our trail. I will strike out and try to pass through them."

"But how—would it not be better for both to go, in different directions? One, alone, may never get through."

"And leave her alone here, in this dark hole? No. I will do my best, but if I fail, then you must try it. If I am not here by midnight, you can feel assured that I will never come; that they have ended my trail. Then you must either attempt taking her in, or else go for assistance yourself, leaving her to await you here. But now good-by. Don't feel uneasy, for I am confident I will succeed. Good-by!"

There was a warm hand-clasp with the two refugees, and with their fervent God-speed ringing in his ears, Oscar turned and reëntered the creek, while Letcher and Agnes groped their way into the cave, after carefully arranging the vine-covered bushes as before.

Their feelings were far from being pleasant, as they reflected upon the desperate venture of their new-found friend, doubly so now, that the Indians knew of their presence in the immediate neighborhood. And then, too, how were they to escape, should he meet with misfortune? The situation was gloomy, indeed.

CHAPTER VII.

BOUND TO THE STAKE.

THE recluse and his daughter gazed around them with natural curiosity, but at first, the abrupt transition from daylight to comparative darkness blinded them. But then, they gradually began to distinguish the outlines of their strange refuge.

It could scarcely be dignified by the name of a cave; a hole would be far more appropriate. Its greatest width was not more than a score feet, while in height, it averaged but little more than one-third that.

The entrance to this den was framed in with rocks, and would not admit the passage of more than one person at a time. The sides, floor and roof were formed of mingled rocks and earth, irregular and unsightly. It was damp, gloomy, and withal not the most pleasant place imaginable, as the two fugitives were forced to admit.

"It has one recommendation," observed the recluse, to Agnes, as they closely scrutinized the den. "The hole is barely large enough for one Indian to get at us at a time, and I can hold it easily, until help comes."

"But what if they use fire—can not they smoke us out?"

Letcher started, but did not reply. This was a peril he had not foreseen, and one, too, that he had no means of guarding

against. Should the savages discover the retreat, and put the plan into execution, the fugitives would be lost indeed.

Letcher took a position close to the entrance, and arranged a small aperture through the bushes, by which means he commanded a tolerably fair view of the creek, for a distance of several yards. He had great hopes that this bold ruse would throw the enemy entirely off the scent, but knowing, as he did, the almost marvelous cunning of the savages while upon the war path, he dreaded lest they should yet unearth them.

As he listened, a cry came to his ears, followed by several rifle-shots, from the same direction; that toward which Oscar Jewett had disappeared. Then came more yells, as he thought, expressive of vindictive joy, telling of some triumph.

Letcher uttered a low groan, and sunk back, his entire frame quivering with horror. Right well did he know what those sounds proclaimed.

"My God! he is lost—they have killed him!" he gasped, as the sounds died away, ceasing abruptly.

"Who—father, what is it?"

"Oscar—they have murdered him! Did you not hear the demons shout in triumph just now?"

Agnes made no reply, but her head bowed upon her hands, though the friendly gloom prevented the recluse from detecting the hot tears that filled her eyes. She had known this young ranger but a few short hours, as time is generally computed, but the time was long enough for him to make a deep and lasting impression upon her mind, and her heart was sadly troubled as she thought of him, dead or dying, knowing that he had given up his young life for her sake.

Neither of the two spoke. Their reflections were too gloomy and dispiriting to be uttered aloud. To give them utterance would only increase their anxiety and natural fears.

Letcher crouched beside his loophole, trying in vain to deduce some ray of hope from the continued silence of the Indians. Might not Oscar have escaped them? No; else, why those yells of exultation?

At length he was forced to believe that the young ranger was either dead or a prisoner, while the savages were searching for himself and daughter, for there had been light enough

upon the lake for them to have counted the fugitives. And once found, the end would be sure: though it might be protracted until he could inflict considerable loss upon the assailants. Still, there could be but one *finale*.

A desperate resolve gradually grew to fill his entire mind. Turning toward his daughter, he muttered, cautiously:

"Agnes, child, are you asleep?"

"No, father, I was only thinking," wearily replied the maiden, lifting her head and hastily brushing away the tears that still dimmed her eyes.

"You heard those shots—those yells?"

"Yes—I heard them."

"And you know—that is—I'm afraid our young friend has fallen into the power of those red devils," hesitated Letcher.

"God forbid! May it not have been some other person?"

"That can hardly be. The woods are not so thickly peopled as that. No, it would be worse than folly to try to blind ourselves to the black truth. They have got him, either dead or alive. The rifle-shots and yells of triumph tell us that, but too plainly. It is a fearful loss to us, Agnes; not only because he was a true-hearted friend, though he won upon my affections greatly in so short a time; but that it cuts down our hopes of escape to one thread. If *that* fails also, then may God have mercy upon you!"

"What do you mean, father?"

"Agnes, my child, I must leave you here alone," slowly responded Letcher.

"Father! But no, you do not mean it—you are only trying my courage."

"I do mean it—there is no other way now. Both our lives depend upon it, child. If we stay here, what will be the result? Sooner or later the Indians will unearth us, or else we must starve for lack of food. You can never stand it to make the journey through the forest, afoot. It would kill you. I must make an attempt to reach the fort, where I can get help to return for you. There is no other resource."

"You will be killed—like *he* was!" brokenly answered the maiden.

"It is a risk I must run. There is a chance, at any rate

that I may succeed. I know the roads well, and I firmly believe that I can elude the Indians."

"Why not wait until night? It will be safer then."

"No, I must not lose the time. We would have to make the return journey entirely by day, then, while now I hope to leave the lake behind us before daybreak. But, darling, you will not be afraid? You know that it is for the best that I leave you, and that should bear your spirits up. Hope that I may return safely—pray for it, child."

"I will—I will," gasped Agnes, as she crept to her father's side and clung tremblingly to his neck. "But I fear the worst—I fear we will never meet again. My presentiment—merciful Heaven! it comes to me stronger than ever! Father, don't go. They will kill you—I know it. I seem to see you now, lying in the forest, still and—dead! Don't go—stay with me, and if we must die, let it be together. We are the last—mother, brother, sister, all gone—all but you. Don't go—it will kill me!"

"Agnes, pet, don't think of that. It *will* be death, if we stay here. Every hour increases our danger, and lessens the hope of escape. Bear up, and show yourself my true, brave-hearted daughter. It is for *your* sake that I go. Cheer up and hope for the best," murmured Letcher, as he kissed his child tenderly.

Agnes, by a powerful effort, regained her composure, at least in seeming. She saw that her father was resolved, and indeed her own good sense told her that his reasoning was correct.

"There, pet, I know you again now. It is for the best that I leave you. But remember, remain quiet here, and don't venture forth on any account. You have food enough, with care, to last you for several days. I will leave my flask full of water for you. I will return by midnight, I hope, but do not look for me before that."

The parting was a silent but heartfelt one. Agnes was greatly agitated, but nobly repressed her emotions, and then the recluse left the cave, after giving the maiden his flask, filled with water from the creek.

Letcher entered the stream and continued down its bed for several hundred yards, before emerging on the opposite side,

for the purpose of preventing any search being made in the vicinity of the den that might end in Agnes' discovery. Then he rapidly strode through the woods, bearing toward the west, and giving the lake shore a wider berth.

He had traversed perhaps two miles since leaving the cave, when he came to an abrupt pause. Before him, upon the still dewy grass, were numerous imprints of moccasined feet.

"Indians—and they have passed by since sunrise!" he muttered, as he straightened up and glanced keenly around him.

A low exclamation broke from his lips as the snapping of a twig met his ears, sounding immediately behind him. A quiet, searching glance showed him that his life was in imminent peril.

He noted several lurking figures gliding along upon his trail, not more than fifty yards in his rear. His first impulse was flight, and inhaling a long breath, he bounded forward like a startled deer.

But this was an unfortunate move, though probably the only one left him. The sound of his footsteps in rapid flight, attracted the attention of those engaged in trailing him, and with wild yells of exultation they sprung forward, at the same time hastily discharging their rifles at the fugitive.

Letcher uttered a low cry, and staggered for a moment, reeling blindly, but then dashed on with unabated speed. He knew that he was hard hit; a dull, peculiar numbing sensation filled his left side.

But the race was of brief duration. The pain in his side quickly robbed Letcher's feet of their fleetness, and he heard the shouts of his pursuers grow nearer and assume a more exultant tone, as they noted the drops of blood that so plentifully sprinkled the grass.

He believed he had received his death-wound, and knowing that he must soon be captured, if he trusted to flight, he abruptly wheeled and threw up his rifle. With little cries the savages sprung to cover behind the nearest trees.

But quick as were their motions, the arm of the recluse anticipated them, and as his rifle cracked, one of the Indians sprung high into the air, uttering his wild death-yell as he fell headlong to the ground tearing convulsively at the dirt and leaves in his agony.

Knowing their prey must be unarmed, the others sprung forward with shrill yells, brandishing their weapons in high glee. But they were obliged to fight for the trophy, ere they won it.

Letcher retreated to the trunk of a huge tree, and desperately clubbed his rifle. Then the savages were upon him.

For a moment the struggle was fierce and deadly, but the wound he had first received was rapidly depleting Letcher's strength. Already his vision was blurred, and his brain reeling.

His blows fell with irregularity, and lacked force, and then a dextrous blow felled him to the ground. He only knew that fresh forces were coming up, and a strong, hoarse voice, with words that he could not understand, rung faintly in his ear, as his senses fled, and he lay there helpless at the mercy of his conquerors.

Strange as it may appear, Letcher's first sensation on returning to consciousness, was of some person trying to restore him. His mouth and throat burned with the taste of fiery brandy, and his face was wet with the same pungent fluid.

Even before he had power to open his eyes, he wondered at this. These persons had tried their best to kill him, and were now as assiduously laboring to preserve his life as before to destroy it.

A low cry broke from his lips as his eyes rested upon a white face; that is, the face of a white man, though deeply tanned and sunburnt. He thought that he had been rescued from death by friends.

But this belief quickly fled, and in its stead came a withering horror. He knew now why such pains had been taken to restore him to consciousness.

Over him bent the renegade, George Girty. A malicious grin distorted his countenance, and a deadly, vindictive light glared in the bloodshot eyes that met the gaze of the recluse.

"Ho! ho! so ye 'cluded to come to, did ye? Lucky, too, fer ef you'd 'a' died there, it 'd 'a' spoilt a heap o' fun. You know me, don't ye? Girty, the renegade? Thet's what you called me yest'day, ain't it? I told ye then to look out."

thet *my* turn 'd come soon. I didn't lie—you see it *has* come, don't ye?"

Letcher did not reply, but averted his eyes with a convulsive shudder. At that moment he thought it would have been far better had he died at once, rather than be in this demon's power, to be tortured both in body and mind.

"Cold, be ye? Trimble like ye hed the ager. Never mind—'twon't last long. Warm ye up, purty soon. I told these fellers ef they wouldn't kill ye jest then, thet I'd show 'em some fun. Must keep my word. I a'ways do. I told them two fellers thet you give me up to, thet I'd be even 'th them, an' so I am. I killed one—the long-legged feller—'th his own knife, an' got away. T'other one is dead, too. Some o' my braves did thet job fer me. An' now I've got *you*."

Girty paused as if expecting a reply, but if so he was disappointed. Letcher firmly met the malicious gaze with a look of stern defiance.

"Why don't you ax what I'm goin' to do 'th ye?"

"Murder me, I suppose. What else can I expect from an accursed renegade? One, too, that has eaten at my board, and been nursed by me through illness. Ingratitude is the nature of the beast," scornfully retorted Letcher.

"An' who saved your life, why don't you add? But you paid me fer bein' sich a durned fool, by givin' me up to be killed; a'ter passin' your word thet you'd do nothin' ontel to-day. But you forgit *thet*, I s'pose. All right. I don't grum'le at it. I'll be even 'th you, though, afore long. But never mind that now. What o' the gal?" he added, abruptly, in evident hopes of catching his captive off his guard.

"Where *you* will never find her," promptly replied Letcher.

"Don't be too shore. You might slip up on it. I know this: she's *alone*, wherever she is, an' cain't git away. She'll come to me, sooner or later, be shore o' thet. I've swore thet I'd hev her fer a squaw, an' so I will. Nothin' kin hender me. But I don't like to wait. I'm old, an' a day, more or less, is a big thing to me, now. So tell me whar she is hid, an' I'll save your life. Not let ye go entirely free, fer the Injuns wouldn't like thet, but I'll promise 'at you can live—*a* wot o' slave, like. Will you do it?"

A contemptuous smile was Letcher's only answer. It greatly enraged Girty but he managed to control his passion.

"I onderstand ye—but don't think it. You'll give in. You *must*—I'll make ye glad to. When you stand at the stake, an' feel the hot flames a-crawlin' up your legs, an' a shettin' off your breath, you'll knuckle under. An' *we'll* be thar, too, to help the fire make it lively fer you. Pitch-pine splinters is nice things, when they're stuck under your finger or toe-nails. Bullet-molds, too, a'ter bein' in the fire fer a bit, look nice a-hangin' to your ears an' tongue. *Feel* good, too. An' hot knives skins a feller so slick. Don't let ye bleed so much—sorter dries it up, ye know. Don't you think you'd better tell me whar the gal is?" grinned Girty, diabolically.

"No! I would rather, ten thousand times, kill her with my own hand, than that she should fall into your power," cried Letcher, desperately, yet unable to restrain a quiver of horror at the atrocities so complacently alluded to by his tormentor.

"You won't hev the chaine, fri'nd, an' be shore *I* won't kill her—onless it's by kindness. Fact is, I'm dead in love 'th her—over head an' years. Made up my mind to git shet o' all my other squaws, so I kin turn my hull 'tention to Agnes. Hev a nice time, she will, ef she acts decent an' don't cut up rusty. I'll whale her then—I will, fer shore. I al'ays do thet to my squaws, when they don't act right. Makes 'em love me, ye see. But come—no foolin'. Tell me whar she's hid, or I'll make you wish you'd never bin born!"

"Do your worst—I defy you!" desperately cried Letcher, straining violently at the raw-hide cords that bound his arms.

"So I will—you hev only yourself to blame, you pesky fool," angrily snarled the renegade, as he turned and uttered a few quick words to the braves, who were standing around.

A general chorus of gratified grunts showed their approval of his decision, and then they scattered through the forest. Letcher was not left long in suspense, and then as the first warrior returned, the worst fears of the wounded captive were confirmed.

He bore a load of dried wood upon his shoulder, that he cast at the foot of a small tree, indicated by Girty, then darting away in quest of more. Others followed this example,

until a goodly pile of fagots were collected. Girty then turned to his prisoner, and rudely jerked him to his feet.

"It's your last chaine—I won't ax you ag'in. Tell me whar the gal is hid, an' I'll save your life yit. Refuse, an' you'll be roasted to death, tortured as 'cutely as a Delaware knows how to do the job."

"I've given my answer. I repeat it—do your worst. I will never tell you where to find her," calmly replied Letcher.

"So be it, then. Die, like the durned fool you air!"

Letcher was dragged to the tree, and firmly secured to its trunk, then the fagots were carefully piled around him, at a little distance. Girty did not speak to him again, but stood overlooking the preparation, adding a suggestion now and then, as his keen eye detected an error.

At length all was completed, and the savages silently drew back. Girty advanced and gazed keenly into the pale face of the victim, searching for some sign of yielding.

But the features of Letcher were firmly set, and it was evident that he had schooled himself to meet the terrible trial with all possible fortitude. A dark scowl wrinkled the renegade's countenance, as he turned away and produced a flint and steel.

A light was speedily procured, by those rude means, and carefully fed with splinters, until the blaze was strong enough to be applied to the dried fagots. Then in a dozen places the flames began to creep up, in and out through the sticks, sending forth forked tongues of scorching heat toward the captive, as though eager to begin the work of torture and death.

Stern and immovably, Letcher's gaze was fixed upon the face of his bitter enemy. He awaited the fearful death, with manly fortitude.

Girty shrunk involuntarily from the gaze, but then, with a fierce oath, he turned toward the eager braves, and uttered a few quick words. A yell answered him. The torture was about to begin!

CHAPTER VIII.

A STERN CHASE.

NONE knew better than did Oscar Jewett, the peril that attended his mission, though he affected to make light of it, while with his friends. He knew that the chances were greatly against his success, now that the Indians knew the fugitives were so close to them.

Discovery by some of the party, who were now, no doubt, scattered through the forest, searching for the broken trail, was almost certain, when a hue and cry would quickly bring all the others upon his heels. Then it would resolve into a race for life.

But, though believing this, Oscar was not one to neglect prudence altogether, and after proceeding down the stream for a short distance, he emerged from it, upon the same side as the cave, where he had left the recluse and his daughter, and glided rapidly along toward the lake shore. In this move, he was influenced by the following reasoning.

He knew that Girty had acted precisely as he would have done in that worthy's place. Besides sending a party direct to the cabin of the recluse, he had closely guarded the lake where it connected with the river, in order to secure those either going to or coming from the fort.

Of course, when the fugitives came in sight, chase was given, and their trail would be followed at hot speed. It was plain enough, until the creek was reached.

Here, Jewett rested his hopes. Naturally the Indians would suppose their prey had followed *down* the stream, as it led toward safety, and in that direction would they look first. But a mile or so below where the fugitives had struck it, the creek emptied into the lake.

Oscar then, headed toward the lake shore, knowing that if his reasoning was correct, he could pass there in comparative safety. He intended recrossing the creek, near where it flowed into the lake, and then continue on, to the fort.

Though proceeding rapidly, he yet used great caution, and resolved that the venture should not fail through any remissness of his own. But he was fated to measure strength with the enemy, after all, and sooner than he anticipated.

His wary eyes caught sight of two dusky figures gliding across his course, before him, recognizing them as savages, and consequently enemies. Before he had time to conceal himself, a cry told that he also was discovered.

The action of all three was prompt and decided. As with one accord, their rifles were thrown up, and discharged. But an Indian is rarely the equal of a white man, where the latter has had equal experience with themselves, and Oscar's rifle belched forth its contents a trifle first.

Though so rapidly aimed, the bullet sped true to its mark, and a smothered death-yell burst from the lips of the stricken red-man, as he sunk quivering to the ground, shot through the heart. There were three reports, nearly simultaneous, and though at such short range, but one was fatal: Jewett was untouched.

The forest rung with loud and shrill yells, from every quarter but one; that beyond the surviving red-skin, where stretched the broad lake. In that direction then, must the young ranger seek freedom.

He sprung toward his enemy, with a low, snarling cry, his face fairly distorted with deadly rage and hatred. The savage clubbed his rifle, and pealed forth the war-cry of his tribe, nerved by hearing the exultant yells of his comrades rapidly nearing him.

Oscar nimbly eluded the desperate blow, and then, quick as thought, his long knife flashed in the light, and then sunk deep into the Indian's chest. Jewett did not pause to repeat the blow; he knew there was little use of that, but jerked the weapon loose and darted on toward the lake.

When beyond view of the spot of death, he proceeded more leisurely, for he knew that unless the savages were attracted by the sound of his footsteps, they would first pause there, and then take up his trail. Once learning its direction, some would probably be sent to cut off his retreat, while others followed the footsteps, to guard against his doubling upon them.

Matters looked blue for the safety of the young ranger, but he retained his usual coolness, through it all. He knew that he would need it, ere the coming race was over.

In a brief time, he found himself close to the lake shore, and casting his eyes toward it, they rested upon the graceful outlines of a canoe. It was empty, and to his surprise, Oscar saw it was none other than that in which he had attempted to rescue Letcher and his daughter.

He feared it was left there for a trap, and gazed suspiciously around. Then from behind him uprose the wild yells of the Indians, telling the scout that they were upon his tracks, mad for revenge upon the slayer of their comrades. That decided his course.

He darted out upon the sands, and then flung himself at full length upon the bottom of the canoe. The impulse thus given caused the boat to shoot out a score of yards into the lake.

Though his every nerve quivered with the expectation of receiving the shot of a concealed foe, yet it did not come. Still, though doubting, he could not remain thus; his pursuers were rapidly nearing him.

Rising to a kneeling posture, Oscar seized the paddle and plied it with all the power of his strong arms. The light canoe darted forward like a bird upon the wing.

A chorus of angry shouts came to his ears, and turning so as to glance over his shoulder, though not relaxing his efforts in the least, Jewett noted a number of Indians standing upon the shore, with leveled rifles. They had followed him, as he anticipated.

The volley rung out, but it was futile. The canoe was already beyond range, and the missiles skipped harmlessly over the placid water.

A silent but gleeful laugh parted the lips of the young ranger, but he did not relax his strokes, though steering more to the right. He knew that at least one other canoe was at hand, and that pursuit would most certainly be made.

"Let them come. It's little harm they can do me now," he muttered, as the paddle rose and fell with the regularity of a machine. "I defy them to catch me before I can put this shell to yonder shore, and once there, with my foes all be-

hind me, I can show my back to the best and fleetest rascal among them. I would hardly have been chosen chief of scouts, else."

The red-skins, upon seeing how futile was their volley, ran hurriedly along the lake shore, uttering a peculiar cry as they did so. It was speedily answered, and from round a point that jutted into the lake, a canoe appeared. Into this several savages sprung, with their rifles, and then, while three braves sturdily plied the paddles, the other two busied themselves with loading the discharged firearms.

The canoe was amply large to accommodate several more, but evidently they believed the five braves were enough to effect the capture of one man, though he was a bold and skillful warrior, as they had tangible evidence in the bodies of their dead comrades. And thus their boat was not overloaded, while a greater degree of speed could be obtained.

An occasional backward glance made Oscar acquainted with these facts, and he quickly realized that he would have his hands full to keep clear of their clutches. For besides the paddlers, there were two braves who had evidently been detailed for marksmen, in case their prey bade fair to gain the other shore before them.

Jewett saw that they were quite rapidly overhauling him, though still beyond rifle-range, while he was plying the paddle to the best of his ability. As his rifle was unloaded, he must trust entirely to flight, for he would have no time to reload, in their faces.

"It will be a close shave, but I can make the Point, if they don't pick me off with their rifles. But I'll risk that. They're poor enough marksmen, at the best, on solid earth, let alone a rickety shell of a canoe, going at race-horse speed. Shoot away, fools that ye are," he muttered, as a whip like crack met his ears. "Ye may hit the lake, but not me. An Indian never lived who could throw lead so far, with any certainty."

The red-skins now seemed to arrive at the same conclusion, as their bullets skipped over the water, to the rear and wide of the flying target. The two canoes were going at race-horse speed, though slowly, surely nearing each other.

Three paddles against one was long odds, as Oscar soon

realized, but he did not relax his exertions in the least. The Point now loomed up before him, and upon that his gaze was bent. Once there, he knew he was safe, for all those in pursuit could do.

Again the marksmen in the hindmost canoe tried their skill, and the reports rapidly succeeded each other, one savage loading as his comrade fired. But still the fugitive sped on, untouched, though more than once sprinkled by the spray dashed up by the ragged, humming missiles.

The perspiration rolled down his face, while every fiber of his frame quivered beneath the intense strain, as he labored at the paddle. Fortunately the haven was almost reached, else he must have succumbed to the killing exertion.

But then a new peril seemed to menace him. From the bushes that lined the extreme end of the Point, there came a tiny puff of blue smoke, closely followed by the report of a rifle.

With a low cry of despair, Oscar faltered, and then abruptly shoved the prow of his canoe to one side. Like an echo, there uprose a cry from the pursuing boat.

And yet, if an echo, it was one with an entirely different cadence. It sounded more like the death-yell of some being in mortal agony!

Oscar turned and glanced backward, just in time to note the foremost paddler fling aloft his arms and fall back against his comrades, throwing them into confusion. What could it mean? Had he been fired at, and the bullet, missing its intended victim, struck the savage?

That was the first thought of the young ranger, but he was quickly undeceived. A clear, strong voice rung out from the cover upon the Point, conveying cheering assurance to his ears.

"Don't be skeered, lad—it's on'y me, Andy Goochland, ye know. Pull in here, an' we'll jest nat'ally give the red devils ge-lory!"

A wild cheer burst from the hunted fugitive's lips, as he urged his boat toward the Point, knowing that he was indeed saved. He had recognized the voice for that of a trusty, true-hearted friend and brother scout.

The red-skins were thrown into great confusion by this

unexpected occurrence, ending as it did in the death of one of their comrades. For a few moments they seemed petrified with surprise, neither advancing nor retreating.

Oscar paddled swiftly on, and as the prow of his canoe touched ground, a second shot came from the ambush. Again a death-shriek from the Delaware canoe testified to the correctness of aim shown by the concealed marksman.

With confused cries of dismay, the Indians betook themselves to the paddles, and sought to flee from their unseen but terrible enemy. They no longer thought of capturing the daring young ranger.

As Oscar dropped the paddle, on gaining the shore, a tall figure sprung toward him from the bushes, bearing a rifle from whose muzzle the smoke was still curling. With an agile bound, he alighted dextrously in the bow of the canoe, and, stooping, grasped the paddle.

"Fodder up, Oscar," he cried, as with one sweep of the paddle he whirled the buoyant canoe around. "Fodder up an' take your revenge on the imps. It's *thar* turn now."

Jewett readily comprehended the meaning of this move, and with eager haste he recharged his rifle. Under the strong arms and dextrous skill of the Herculean hunter the little boat was fully holding its own with, if not gaining upon the other canoe, that was now reduced to three paddlers, with the extra weight of two dead men.

"Pop it to 'em, lad. You're good fer thet fur. Knock the hindermost man—it'll lop-side the canoe," muttered the tall hunter, as he slightly bowed his head, so as to give Jewett a fairer view of their foes.

The short, heavy rifle quickly uprose, and echoed forth a death-knell to the red-skin aimed at. Uttering little yells of despair, the other two Delawares plied their paddles with frantic energy.

But their skill alone would not have saved them. Long ere the further shore was reached, the ranger could have picked them both off.

"Keep on, Andy, man—hold to your stroke," said Oscar, as Goochland abruptly ceased his labors. "A minute longer and they're both ours!"

"No, no, lad; we've did well a-plenty, as 'tis. Biggest half,

we've got: it'll do. I think it'd spile our plans to go any further, jest now," coolly responded the tall hunter.

"What do you mean?"

"Your blood is over-bet, now, lad, or you'd see it 'thout any o' my help, but I'll tell yer. Six or eight red-skins kin paddle a canoe faster'n two whites, cain't they? You know they've got other boats thar—then wouldn't they chase us ef we went too cluss? Sartinly they would—it's human natur'. Then we'd hev to do some tall travelin' to save our skelps. To be shore, we mought do thet, ef needs be, but it don't suit jest now. We need our time for somethin' else—which somethin' else, I take it, is a old man an' young gal critter thet you've hed some trouble fer, a'ready. Onderstand?"

"In part, I do, bat not how you came to know all this. But the imps are nearing the shore. We had better be paddling back, or down toward the river."

"Jest so. Load up both rifles, an' I'll tell ye how I kem to know so much," said Goochland, as he paddled steadily toward the shore they had last left. "You know I'd bin out, tellin' the settlers what was up, like you was. Wal, I was on my road back, when I sighted a fire over yender, last night. You know what it was, I reckon, fer I jedge thet it was you made the rumpus, an' stole the canoes, though I didn't know it then. Ef I hed, I'd 'a' waded in, too."

"You were there? You saw that poor girl murdered?"

"Yas, I saw it. It was did too quick fer me to interfere. I was sneakin' round tryin' to git her free, ef it could be did by one man. I was thar, when thet runnygade, Girty, kem back an' told 'bout you—though he spoke so durned fast I couldn't rightly foller him. I up an' drawed a bead on the cuss, but then I found, as I crawled through the bresh, I'd lost my flint. Afore I could fix another, they'd sot out a'ter you. I follered 'em, an' so missed meetin' 'th you."

"I kept a'ter 'em when they went up to the cabin, whar thet old feller lives, but you'd got the start o' them thar. I manidged to hear enough to know thet the imps hed sot a trap fer you by the river, an' so I slipped around them: an' sot out to warn you, ef I could. But I was too late. They saw you, an' you tuck to kiver, while I was a'most a mile above the place."

"I don't know how you dodged me, but I couldn't find ye, though I did my best, an' hung on ontel I hed to do some mighty slick doublin' to keep out o' the way o' the imps as was huntin' fer you. They did git on my trail onc't, but I washed it out in the crick, an' then got to the lake. I gobbled one o' thar boats, an' then put across, thinkin' mebbe they'd foller me, an' thet way give you a clean trail, but they didn't, though I hollered a-plenty.

"I knowed you was hid some'rs, an' was tryin' to think how I could help you out, when I heerd shootin' goin' on over thar. I struck out to'rds it, but as it kem nigher I dodged back ag'in, afore you fellers see'd me. When I see'd how matters stood, I kep' along shore ontel I made out whar you was goin' to land, an' then got ready to take a hand in. I did—you know how the thing worked," concluded the tall hunter.

"You saved my life, too, old friend," said Oscar, earnestly. "I was nearly exhausted. They must have caught me on shore, even if they had not picked me off before. I owe you my life."

"Git out—I didn't do no sech a thing, an' ef I did, what's it to make sech a thunderin' fuss about—say? Don't talk so—it sounds foolish, lad," muttered Goochland, as the canoe touched land, and he sprung out upon the shore, followed by Oscar Jewett.

CHAPTER IX.

WHERE?

"WELL, what do you think we had best do first, Goochland?" uttered the young ranger, as his tall comrade lifted the canoe from the water and deposited it carefully in a clump of bushes.

"We must talk thet over, lad. But fust, tell me whar or airth you left the old man an' gal?"

In a few brief words Oscar described the situation of the den where Letcher and Agnes were concealed. Goochland seemed surprised, but for a moment did not speak.

"Wal, what did you intend doin', ef you give the reds the slip?"

"I thought of going to the fort, for help."

"Too fur—'d take too much time. We'd hev to put it, fer that pesky imp, Girty, 'll watch the river mighty cluss, now. We couldn't git back to them, much afore day, even s'posin' we didn't hev no bresh 'th the imps. No, 'twon't do," decisively uttered Goochland.

"What then?"

"We must do it—us two. We kin, I b'lieve. We kin wait here ontel 'most dark, then cross, git them an' take to the canoe ag'in. In the night we kin manage to pass sech imps as he hes putt to watch the river."

"But he will be looking around where he lost us. He swore he'd have revenge on Letcher, and I believe he would as soon lose his own life as miss it. He knows they must be hidden somewhere not far off, for he saw me get clear, alone. I'm afraid 'twill be difficult, if not impossible," thoughtfully replied Jewett.

"An' *you* use sech talk—git out! I don't know ye when I hear ye talk thet-a-way, lad. 'Tain't like ye to think o' failin' or to count the danger afore the work is all done. What ails you? You ain't like your own self, to-day."

"I don't know; but I have a presentiment that we will fail—that this affair will turn out the greatest calamity of my life. I do not know why—for, as you say, such is not my nature—but I can not help it. The belief comes in spite of myself."

Andy Goochland gazed keenly upon his comrade, in wondering silence, then averted his head with a peculiar grunt. Oscar's face flushed hotly, but he did not speak for some moments. When he did, it was in an entirely different tone.

"I'm foolish, Andy, but let it pass. Your plan is the best, and we will carry it out, if two men can do so. Shall we stay here?"

"Yes. It gives a good view of the lake. You lay down an' take a nap; it'll make you all right ag'in. I'll watch. We won't need to start afore sundown, anyhow."

Jewett followed this advice, and in a few moments was sleeping soundly. Goochland took up a position that afforded

Lim a good view of the lake, as well as the shore upon ~~either~~ side of the Point, and lighting his pipe, smoked contentedly, as though fully assured there was not an enemy within a thousand miles of his position.

This attitude of lazy ease, added to the soothing fumes of the burning weed, soon told Andy that he, too, was sleepy. He had been traveling almost incessantly since the morning before, and had not once closed his eyes during that time.

He strove to cast off the feeling of drowsiness, but not entirely with success. As the hours slowly dragged on, his head drooped and the heavy lids covered his eyes.

He aroused with a start, and glanced quickly around him. Nothing suspicious was to be seen, and all was still, save the usual forest sounds, and the gentle ripple of water upon the lake shore. And yet it seemed as though there was a faint echo of human voices, still ringing in his ears.

"I was asleep—look how the shadders hes moved!—an' dreampt it. Mus'n't do so no more, though I *am* powerful sleepy, thet's a fact. Look at *him*—snoozes like a log," muttered Andy, eying the motionless form of the young ranger, a little enviously.

Goochland did not allow himself to be caught napping again, and when the sun disappeared behind the western forest, he gently aroused Oscar Jewett, who arose, fresh and vigorous. They hastily partook of a few scraps of dried meat, washed down with water from the lake, and then set about their self-imposed duty.

Goochland led the way down-shore to where he had concealed the larger canoe, that he had appropriated, as detailed, as the other one was hardly large enough to contain four persons. Then trusting in the rapidly-gathering gloom to cover their movements, the two scouts paddled boldly across the lake, heading so as to strike the shore some distance below where the creek emerged from the woods.

"Now, Oscar, lad, we must hide the canoe, fust of all, fer we'd be in a purty fix ef we shed git the folks out an' down here, on'y to find thet some pesky, copper-skinned thief hed stole our travelin' rig. Help me put it in thet clump o' bushes thar. Nobody won't notice it thar. I don't reckon," whispered Goochland, as they stepped from the frail craft.

"It will do, but now come on. We'd best make a circle 'round; then if we're found out before reaching the den, it won't leave the imps any clue where to hunt for them," muttered Oscar, as he glided up the bank, followed by Andy.

Stealthily they glided along, using the greatest possible care to avoid any rustling of bushes or sound that might betray them to their foemen. Suddenly Oscar paused, with a faint hiss parting his lips.

"I thought I heard a footstep," he muttered, after a brief period of intense listening, "but I must have been mistaken," and then the two scouts proceeded as before.

Presently Goochland began sniffing the air suspiciously, like the startled deer, when the favoring wind wafts to his nostrils the hot scent of hounds. The atmosphere was unmistakably impregnated with a peculiar stench, and in a moment more Jewett also noted it.

"What kin it be?" muttered Andy, curiously. "Smells like a barbecue—but 'tain't thet, I don't guess, 'way out here."

"I fear 'tis more than thet," and Oscar's voice trembled as he spoke. "Once before, I have met that stench—it was when we found the remains of an Ottawa, who had been roasted alive by the Delawares!"

"Then you think—?"

"I don't know—but I fear the worst. Come on—we will soon see," agitatedly replied Jewett, his heart throbbing wildly.

A few minutes of careful progress brought them upon the scene of the sickening stench. At the foot of a small tree there still flickered a few embers, that cast a weird light through the little glade.

Though greatly agitated, the two scouts were far too wary to at once approach the object, but circled the spot until assured there remained no foes in the vicinity. Then they glided up beside the tree of death.

The dim light was still sufficient to reveal a horrible sight to their gaze. A sight that caused them, strong-hearted men though they were, to tremble like terror-stricken children.

To the tree that was blackened and charred by the fire that

still flickered feebly around its base, hung the ghastly remains of what had been a human being. Only the head and trunk remained; the lower limbs were entirely consumed.

Oscar sprung within the fiery circle, and peered into the drooping face. But there was nothing by which he could distinguish the identity of the unfortunate being.

The flames had charred and disfigured every feature. The scalp was gone, having evidently been torn off before death came to relieve the sufferer.

"Come, Oscar—come," huskily muttered Goochland, as he turned away, heartsick, from the terrible sight; "we cain't do nothin' here. The poor feller is past our help, but mebbe 'twas a stranger. Mebbe we'll find 'em all right yet," he added, in a feeble attempt at consolation.

"No, I know it's him—Letcher. And Agnes—where is she?" groaned Jewett, staggering back.

"Look here, lad, this won't *never* do," sternly whispered Andy, as his strong hand closed upon the young avenger's shoulder. "Even ef it is the old man, *she's* all right. He wouldn't hurt *her*, ef what you said is true. He'd keep her a pris'ner fer his squaw, when he got back home. Then we may git her yit. We will, shore—I sw'ar it. But fust, we must see if she's gone from the hole—that'll tell us all. We'll know by thet how to work the job. But you mus'n't act the fool, now, onless you want to spile it all. Be a man, and I'll see you through with it."

"I will—don't fear for me any longer, Andy," returned Jewett, with a powerful effort regaining his wonted composure. "I will not give way again. Come on—to the cave."

"Easy, then. Don't be brash. The imps may still be 'around here, waitin' fer us to come a'ter the gal. It's most like they air. They know you'll come back, 'ither alone or with help, an' may count on takin' us by surprise," continued the old hunter.

Rapidly they glided along, noiseless as forest phantoms, and in a short time neared the vicinity of the den, when they proceeded more gradually. At length the creek was reached, directly opposite the hill, in which Oscar had left father and daughter, when he set forth upon his perilous mission.

For several minutes the two scouts lay there, crouching

low down and gazing keenly around them. The moon now cast a bright light down upon the rock, and along the open space, but nowhere could their close scrutiny detect the shape of a foeman.

Then Oscar uttered the signal agreed upon between him and the recluse, by which he should announce his return with assistance, but no answer came to his ear. Fearing the worst, he sprung lightly across the stream, followed by the tall scout, and hurriedly parted the matted screen of bushes.

"Friends—why don't you answer? We are here to help you. Mr. Letcher—Agnes!"

But no answer came in reply to the eager tones of the young ranger. With a low cry he darted into the dark cavity, his worst fears confirmed, forgetful of the peril that might menace him, aroused by his incautious tones.

But not so Andy Goochland. He had not the deep and peculiar interest in the father and daughter that his young comrade felt, and he was not one to be easily thrown off his guard. Then, while Oscar sprung inside, he crouched down beside the bush, in the deep shade, with ready rifle, and his eyes roving keenly around him.

And he quickly saw that his suspicions were well-founded—that mischief was afoot. Along the creek shore, he noticed the dim, phantom-like figures of two red-skins rapidly approaching the spot, and knew that they had noted the action of himself and comrade.

"The imps air on us, Oscar," he said, as his long rifle sprung to his shoulder, and its contents were discharged at the foremost skulker.

A wild uproar ensued. The death-yell of the stricken savage was echoed back in shrill cries and shouts of triumph, coming from every point of the compass.

And then the keen eye of Andy Goochland observed the dusky figures springing forward from the level, from the hill-side, from every direction, closing in upon them like the fabled web of fate. Flight was clearly impossible, and he sprung into the hole, coming into violent collision with Oscar, whom the alarm had drawn from his fruitless quest.

"Quick! to the hole an' plug the fust one as shows his head, while I load," cried Goochland, as he sprung to his

feet and began charging his rifle. "We must fight for life now."

"It is as we feared—they have got her, and watched for us," muttered Jewett, brokenly, as he prepared his rifle for use.

He was not a moment too soon, either, for just then the bushes were violently parted, and the beplumed head of a savage appeared at the entrance. A flash, a sullen crack, and the red-skin sunk back, his skull blown to atoms.

CHAPTER X.

THE MAID'S GREAT PERIL.

As Letcher left the cave, the forced composure Agnes had assumed gave way, and she abandoned herself to thoughts the most agonizing and bitter. It seemed revealed to her that never more in this life would she behold that face or the loved voice of her dear parent.

She crept close to the cave entrance, and listened in painful suspense, for the sounds she hoped she would never hear. Then a low cry broke from her lips, as she sunk down, with tightly clenched teeth and distorted countenance.

Sounds almost precisely similiar to those that had agitated Letcher, some hours before, and that had induced him to venture forth in quest of help, now came to her ears. The faint, far-off sound of human cries—the echo of rifle-shots.

Like her father, not many hours previously, Agnes firmly believed that these sounds were a death-knell; that they proclaimed the murder of her parent. She felt that her vague premonitions were but too completely fulfilled, and her brain reeled beneath this last blow. She sunk down in a death-like swoon.

And while she lay there, her ghastly face upturned in the faint light that shimmered weirdly down through the leafy screen, happily oblivious to all earthly matters, a truly horri-

ble event was transpiring out in the woods. While she lay there, he on whose account she had fainted, was meeting a fearful death at the hands of the fiendish Delawares, led and commanded by George Girty.

Slowly roasting at the stake, being tortured with all the devilish ingenuity that hatred and enmity could devise, or recollect from hearing their ancestors' descriptions of the sports of *their* youth, Francis Letcher yielded up his life, stubbornly refusing to tell where his loved child was hidden, though groaning aloud in his horrible agony.

And as the head of his captive drooped forward, George Girty uttered a fiendish curse. Though his foe was dead, he felt that he himself was the vanquished, not the victor.

And then once more he set to work searching for the lost maiden. He followed up Letcher's trail, but that was soon lost in the water. Searching carefully either bank, the savages glided up-stream, passing close beside where Agnes lay, still in a death-like swoon, with but a frail screen of leaves hiding her from the worst enemy she possessed upon earth. But the friendly rocks had retained no trace of the passing footsteps, and the party glided on, unsuspecting how close they were to the object of their search.

With a low moan, Agnes awoke to life and consciousness. She gazed around in momentary bewilderment, but then the dread truth flashed upon her mind, and an agonizing moan fell from her pallid lips.

Her brain reeled, and it seemed as though she would sink back again, but then with a strenuous effort, Agnes banished the feeling of dizziness, and arose to her feet. There was a fixed purpose in her mind, and she lost no time in putting it into execution.

Mechanically she gathered up the little bundle of food that still remained as it had been tied up before leaving the cabin, and then parting the bushes, she emerged into the open air. The sun had sunk out of sight, and the shades of night were rapidly gathering.

This faint light revealed the wan expression that rested upon her features, and a strange, fixed look in her eyes. Her gaze rarely wandered aside, and when it did, there was no change in the expression. To have observed her then, one

would have believed that her brain had been seared by some crushing sorrow.

Agnes entered the creek, and began descending with the current. Though she seemed to entertain no fears, her progress was very silent and cautious. Her feet were lifted and planted without a splash, or scarcely an audible ripple.

The air was filled with a strange, sickening effluvium, but she noticed it not, though a slight obstruction in the creek had forced her to take to the shore, and she passed within a hundred yards of where the fearful tragedy had occurred. And now, as when in the water, her progress was marked with a degree of caution, that in more natural moments, would have been far beyond her power to imitate.

A faint rustling noise caught her ear, and she instantly paused, standing close beside a tall tree, her dark figure blending with the trunk. Then she heard the footsteps pass on and die away in the distance.

Unknowing how close she had been to true friends—to one whom she had bitterly mourned as lost—Agnes glided on once more, veering to the left. And then the woods seemed to vanish, and she stood upon the bank of the lake.

She paused, gazing vacantly out upon its broad level expanse, when a wild tumult suddenly broke the stillness of the forest. Rifle-shots and yells, shrill and unearthly, came from the point she had so recently left, telling of fearful strife, precipitated by the raging of human passions.

This event seemed to dissipate the cloud that had rested upon her brain, perhaps from being so similar to that which had caused it—the alarm consequent upon the capture of her father. She gave a convulsive start, and gazed wildly around her, in mortal affright.

“My God! where am I? what has happened?” broke from her pallid lips, in bewilderment.

Again the shrill yells came to her ear, accompanied by rifle-shots, and then, with a low shriek, Agnes dropped the bundle she had clung to through all before, and fled at headlong speed down the lake shore.

On she dashed, hearing only the significant sounds that still uprose behind her, unheeding the bruises and scratches inflicted upon her tender person by the stubborn bushes through

which she crashed, thinking only of flight. And still onward she pressed until the sounds died out from the spot she had abandoned, and naught met her ear save the sounds of her own footsteps and the wild throbbing of her own heart.

Her brain throbbed and burned until it seemed as though it must burst to relieve the fearful strain. A reddish glare swept before her eyes, and a sickening choking filled her throat.

With a gasping groan, Agnes staggered blindly forward a few steps, and then sunk in a quivering heap to the ground. Once more the impress of death seemed upon her; as though a merciful Providence had taken pity on her anguish, and had quelled it forever by extinguishing the breath of life.

But such was not the case. She was still to live—to suffer on. The spark of life yet smoldered in her breast, though seemingly extinct.

The long, dreary night dragged on, and the gray light was dawning in the east, when Agnes' eyes feebly unclosed. Though wan and weary, a light of sanity flickered in their depths. Her temporary aberration had passed away with this last swoon.

Agnes struggled to her feet and gazed despairingly around her. For a moment she was bewildered, but then the familiar landmarks told her where she was, though how she came there was still a blank.

But slowly, and one by one, the dire events of the past day came to her mind, and then she comprehended the truth: that she had fled from the hill den in a fit of insanity.

A groan of agonizing despair broke from her lips, as she sunk back to the damp ground, and covered her face with her hands. She remembered it all now. She was alone, without a friend upon earth.

Her father was dead; she believed that as firmly as though her eyes had rested upon his last moments. And that other—the handsome young ranger, the only friend besides that had known of her perilous situation, was also gone. Quite as firmly did she believe in his death.

But then she arose, pale and calm. She would not give way and lie down thus to die, unresistingly. She would struggle on for life though it seemed so worthless to her now.

A glance showed her where she was; not more than a mile above the head of the river. By following its banks, she knew she could reach safety among those of her own race, if unmolested while on the way.

And thus, feebly and wearily, she struggled on down the shore, without any attempt at concealment from the eyes of any enemy who might chance to be in the vicinity. Her mind was too greatly shattered to think of that, now.

Presently a gleam of light swept over her features. She remembered a family who had more than once shown them kindnesses, when first settling in this section; a family of rude but hospitable settlers, whose cabin stood but a short distance ahead, close to the head of the river.

But then her heart sunk again. For reason told her that they would have fled to the fort for safety, at the first alarm, and she would only find the deserted cabin, if, indeed, it had escaped the leveling torch of the savages.

Still, hoping even against hope, Agnes tottered on, her eyes straining to catch the first glimpse of the cabin. And then she paused, faint and trembling.

"It is there—still standing! Pray God that they are still at home!"

The rude cabin, nestling upon the river bank, overshadowed by tall trees standing close behind it, was now in full view. But Agnes' wistful gaze could detect no signs of life about the premises.

No smoke curled upward from the rude stick chimney, and the slat door was closed. She knew then that its inhabitants must have fled, else at this time of day there would have been visible signs of life about the building.

Heart-sick and faint, Agnes still struggled on. Her voice sounded husky and unnatural as she murmured:

"They are gone, but I may find some food there. I can go no further without that, and rest."

Little wonder. Since fleeing from her home, not a mouthful of food had passed her lips. At first the excitement had deprived her of appetite, and then when she realized that she was left alone in the world, she thought not of hunger. The bundle of provisions had been left where she had dropped it, on awaking from her trance-like apathy, and now she

knew that without food to strengthen her, she must soon drop and perish by the roadside.

Agnes soon gained the rude door-yard, and hastened up to the cabin. Its deathlike solitude awed her soul, and she hesitated with a sickening dread, before opening the door. But then, with an effort, she suddenly pushed it open wide, and stepped upon the threshold.

A low cry of horror broke from her lips, and she clutched convulsively at the door-casing to sustain her sinking limbs. Truly, it was a fearful sight that met her gaze.

The rough floor of the small room was stained with blood, that stood in little hollows of the warped planks, glazed and coagulated. The room everywhere bore traces of a fierce conflict, though as evidently a brief one.

In various attitudes there lay five forms, all dead, all mangled by the brutal ferocity of their destroyers. Agnes recognized them as members of the once-happy family she had known for years.

The forms of father, mother, and three children of graduated ages, the youngest a little boy, just old enough to toddle alone. All were dead, either shot, stabbed or tomahawked, and each one had been scalped.

Yet terrible as it was, Agnes knew that this was not all. There was yet one unaccounted for; a young girl, of near her own age.

Led on by an impulse she could not resist, Agnes moved forward, shudderingly passing around the ghastly pile, and entering the inner room. A glance showed her that it was empty. Then she quickly mounted into the loft.

That for which she sought was not there, and with a feeling of relief, Agnes turned to descend. She began to hope that the girl had escaped the massacre, little dreaming of the scene witnessed at the forest camp-fire by Oscar Jewett and Andy Goochland, where the last member of that ill-fated family had met a violent death.

With a tremor of fear, Agnes paused. Her quick ear had caught the sound of a low, cat-like footfall upon the threshold of the room below. She seemed to know by intuition that a new peril threatened her.

Agnes stood as motionless as though frozen in her tracks

The steps still echoed faintly from below, and she knew that whoever it might be was passing through to the second room.

The thought that it might possibly be a friend never once entered her head. She believed it was an Indian, either one of the destroying party, whose bloody work she had so recently gazed upon, or one who had chanced by and was drawn by curiosity, or the hopes of plunder, to enter the cabin of death.

Then, to her horror, Agnes heard a creaking step upon the rickety ladder, and knew that the intruder was mounting to the loft. Though to move would assuredly have betrayed her, Agnes would have shrunk back, but her limbs refused to obey her will. She could only stand there, with eyes riveted upon the open trap-door.

Then, as if by magic, the aperture was filled by the head and broad shoulders of a man. The fiercely-glowing black eyes, the dusky, paint-bedaubed face, and the fanciful head-dress, all proclaimed the savage.

A glow of surprise filled the black eyes, as they rested upon the rigid form of the maiden. They seemed to fascinate her like the glitter of a serpent's orbs. She stood motionless, returning his gaze with a look of horror.

Giving one quick look around the loft, the savage sprung up, uttering a gratified grunt as he approached Agnes. This movement broke the spell that bound her, and she shrunk back, with a low cry.

A fierce scowl distorted the Indian's features, and he half-drew the hatchet from his girdle, while giving utterance to a few quick words that Agnes could not understand. But the gesture sufficed; she knew that instant death was threatened in case she made any outcry.

Still closely watching her, the savage stooped and picked up a snarl of strong cord that lay at his feet, and then dextrously bound her hands behind her back. Then, with a rough jerk, he dragged Agnes to the head of the ladder.

Descending first, the savage pulled Agnes unresistingly after him. Shoving her into one corner, with a significant motion toward his belt, he turned to search the building more closely.

He was evidently disappointed in finding the expected

booty, for his grim features wore a look of angry disgust as he returned once more to his captive. Agnes shrunk from his gloating gaze with a sensation of sickening horror.

Then, as if impressed with a new purpose, the red-skin turned and began throwing in a pile, near the center of the room, such articles as were of a combustible nature, after which he stooped, and producing a flint and steel, dextrously kindled a fire. He intended finishing thoroughly the work of destruction begun by his people.

As the flames shot up, he carefully fed them, until strong enough, when the rude furniture was cast upon the pile. Then he dragged Agnes out through the doorway, with a rudeness that wrung a shriek of pain from her lips.

A frightful scowl overspread his repulsive features, and twining one hand in the disheveled locks of hair, he brandished his glittering hatchet above the trembling maiden's head.

CHAPTER X

ANDY'S DISCOVERY.

THOUGH Oscar Jewett had so summarily disposed of their first assailant, their peril was by no means over. The eager red-skins, knowing that the prey of which they had been so long defrauded was now before them, made a fierce onset, resolved to end the matter then and there.

But they labored under one great difficulty. They did not know what kind of a refuge the pale-faces had found, nor how it could be entered.

Thus, when a full dozen rushed frantically at the screen of bushes from whence had spouted forth the two fatal shots, they had confused each other and prevented an entrance, while most eager to accomplish that. In the struggle, the bushes were crushed down to the ground, and the hanging vines torn away, thus laying bare the small dark cavity, through which only one man could pass at a time, and then only in a dog-like position—upon all fours.

Partially sheltered by the projecting rocks, Oscar dropped his rifle, and thrust viciously out into the writhing mass with his long knife. That his blows were not without effect, was evident from the howls and cries of pain from the savages, as he felt the hot blood pouring over his knife hand.

Then Goochland came forward, just in time to turn the scale in their favor, his reloaded rifle was emptied into the dense mass of Indians with terrible effect, and as his knife seconded the efforts of Jewett, the enemy gave way and disappeared from the entrance, with yells of dismay.

"Load up, Oscar, we'll hev the time now," panted Goochland, as the red-skins turned and dashed from the spot. "They'll come ag'in, soon."

With all possible dispatch, the two scouts prepared their firearms, and then quietly crouched down to await the course of events, full well knowing that they would be attacked again, and that in a more systematic manner. And though they both felt that the struggle must end in their destruction, neither thought of fear or surrender.

"Hellow! down thar!" came a hoarse voice, sounding from the hillside nearly above them: the voice of a white man, and Oscar thought he recognized it as that of George Girty.

"Hellow yourself, then, an' see how you like it," retorted Andy, keeping well covered, but ready for instant action.

"Don't be sassy—ye may be sorry for it ef ye do," angrily replied the voice; then adding, in a more placable tone "Who air you two fellers, anyhow?"

"Better ax your red imps thar. They kin tell ye, mebber Reckon they'd say we was *men*, ef they told the truth."

"Look here, my brash cove, you won't make nethin' by sech talk. Talk decent, an' mebber it'll be better fer ye. What I want to know is, hev you got the gal thar—old Letcher's gal, I mean?"

Oscar uttered a faint cry, and a wild hope sprung up in his heart. Could it be that he was wrong?—that Agnes had, in some strange manner, eluded this monster, and was now free?

"S'posin' we hev—what good'll thet do *you*?" giving his excited comrade a significant kick with one foot, as a hint to restrain his emotions.

"I want her—"

"Then why in thunder don't you come an' git her? We keep open doors," interrupted Andy, impudently.

"I may do it yit, ef you git too durned sassy. But now lis'en. Mebbe you don't know who I am. I'm George Girty!" and the renegade paused, as if to enjoy the effect of this announcement.

"The biggest, nastiest, meanest, cowardliest, sneakin' thief onhung—yas, I know ye."

A fierce, snarling curse followed this contemptuous speech, but then Girty resumed:

"You'll bite yer own fool head off yit, I tell ye plainly. I want to treat with ye, for I don't like to make a rush, when the gal mought git hurt, in the rumpus. I want *her*, not you fellers. Give her up, an' I sw'ar thet you may go jist whar you please, an' not be tetched. Will ye do it?"

"Air I a fool?" retorted Andy, with supreme contempt for this flimsy device to entrap them. "Not much. I wa'n't raised on skim-milk. You can't fool a crow 'th a cracked stick. The gal you ax about *is* here, an' here she'll stay, on-til you kin pick up courage enough to come an' take her out. But you must take *us* fust."

"We kin starve ye out."

"Not much—I reckon you'd git onmarciful tired o' waitin' afore thet. We hain't got a army wagon full o' grub, nor yit a lake o' water here, but we *hev* got a plenty to last us a few days. I hed a full meal yest'day—won't want no more fer a week. I'm the big sea-sarpint o' St. Clair. I don't eat oftenex 'n onc't a month. Any thin' else 't ye want to know?"

"Look here—better give the gal up. I'll take good care on her. Better live than die in thar. We'll smoke ye out, ef ye act the fool much longer. How does *that* fit?"

"Try it. We're smoke proof, ye pesky fool. Don't talk so durned much—you make me sick."

"I'll make you a heap sicker 'n ye be now, afore long—see 'f I don't," angrily snarled Girty.

"It's a bad look-out, Oscar, I'm afraid," muttered Goochland, as he strove to catch a glimpse of some foeman, through the opening.

"But *she* is safe—it must be so, or why did he say *that*? She has got clear, some way," eagerly uttered Oscar.

"Wish I know'd *how*, I'd try it myself, durned ef I wouldn't. It's a bad job, shore. We're holed up here, an' ef thar's any way to git out, *I* cain't see it, nobow. Ef they *do* try the smoke dodge, we kin on'y make a bu'st for it. Better git killed 'th a bullit then stay here to be smoked like a side o' pork!" said Goochland, gloomily.

They both relapsed into silence. Their situation was not the most enviable, to say the least. It seemed as though their race was over, at last, beyond a doubt.

The red-skins without were silent, though our friends well knew this did not imply that they were idle. The refugees distinguished the moaning of the freshening breeze among the treetops, and occasional gusts came eddying into the den. Andy Goochland suddenly uttered an exclamation.

"What! jest feel, Oscar. The wind runs in here in a stiddy stream. How is thet?"

"What of it?"

"Ef it keeps comin' in, an' don't never go out *here*, whar does it goes? Thar *must* be some other way fer it to git out. You'd ought to know the place—is thar any other hole 'cept this?" eagerly whispered Andy.

"No—that is, a hole *does* run a little ways back there, but it's stopped up. Don't build any hopes on that, Andy."

"Never you mind. You jest keep my rifle, an' don't let the reds play any tricks on you, while I look into this. Ef the wind gits out, thar must be a hole leadin' out to the clear. Ef thar's a hole, it must be big enough fer us to git through, or else too lettle. Ef too lettle, then we must make it *bigger*. See? Thar's *my* logic. But whar's the place?"

"Back there, straight on until you find a sharp rock sticking out. Then look by its side. But it's too small. I tried it before."

At this juncture the red-skins without began a series of tactics that told the two beleaguered scouts they had little time left them in which to devise plans of escape. From the creek bed and scattered behind tree-trunks, a number of the savages began a continuous fusilade upon the cave entrance, though making no attempt to enter it.

Their bullets pattered harmlessly against the jagged roof of the den, owing to the entrance being considerably above

the level of the marksmen. This fusilade above could work no good, as Oscar was well sheltered, but he knew it was only a shield to something more to the purpose.

He uttered a low cry, and half arose, as a rattling sound came from just before the entrance, but then he divined the cause. The red-skins were casting down brush before the den, intending to put their plan of smoking the pale-faces out, into prompt execution.

The firing was intended to protect the brush-gatherers from the weapons of the besieged. Between the shots fired into the entrance, they could not secure an aim, without exposing themselves to almost certain death.

A peculiar rumble and then a slight jar, called Jewett's attention toward where Goochland had proceeded, and with a nervous thrill, he asked:

"Are you hit, Andy? Have they shot you?"

"No—I'm all right. You keep on watchin', I'll be thar bime-by."

In a few minutes the cave-entrance was completely blocked up with brush, and the savage marksmen had ceased firing. Oscar thrust out his rifle, and attempted to push the pile back, but at the rustling sound, several rifles cracked, and the bullets tore through the heap, covering the young ranger with splinters.

He saw that another such move might be fatal, and drew back into his niche.

Jewett knew full well that nothing he could do, could hinder the brush from being fired, and then a very few minutes would suffice to render the den untenable. But he resolved that he would not die thus, like a rat in its hole; rather than that, he would spring out through the fire, and perish in hand to hand strife.

"Andy, come here," he said, turning his head.

But no reply came. A sickening dread assailed him. Had that last volley been fatal—had one of the missiles found its way to that true and faithful heart?

Fearing this, Oscar sprung to his feet and glided back to where he had last heard Goochland's voice. His foot struck against some prostrate object, and, staggering back, he saved himself only by an effort.

"Andy—Andy, why don't you speak? where are you—~~tak~~ me that you are safe!" he gasped, huskily.

"Hellow, what's the matter? Ain't hurt, be ye?" came the welcome tones of his comrade, from directly before him, to Jewett's great surprise.

"Why didn't you answer before? Is this a time for such foolish play, Andy?" reproachfully uttered Oscar.

"Didn't hear ye. But how is it? Hellow! back thar!"

A dull, reddish light now filled the air, and the scouts could see that several brands of fire had been cast down upon the brush heap, and these the fresh breeze was fanning to a blaze. Already a pungent, smoky odor filled the cave.

"It has come—we are lost!" muttered Oscar, desperately. "But we will strike one blow first! Come, Andy, follow me!"

"Stop! tell me what ye goin' to do, fust?" coolly asked Goochland.

"Break through and fight them. They can only kill us. One may get away, but if we stay here, it's certain death for both."

"I kin show ye better'n thet, lad, a heap. While they're foolin' 'way at the fire, we'll jist slip out at the *back door*, an' make tracks fer home."

"The back—what do you mean? I don't understand you," stammered Oscar, then following with his eyes the pointing finger of his comrade, the solution of Andy's speech lay before him.

The sharp rock he had alluded to, lay upon the cave floor, where the strong arms of Goochland had placed it. And behind where it had rested, was a small, dark cavity, quite plainly revealed by the rapidly increasing light that poured into the little den from the crackling brush-heap.

That there was a strong draft through this, the peculiar rushing sound evidenced, and, from this, Jewett comprehended that the tunnel led out into open air. In surprise he turned toward Andy Goochland.

"You know what I said? Wal, it was so, when I kim to look. So I jest pulled out thet stone, an' crawled along to see how fur the hole went, afore tellin' you. It makes a turn, an' comes out away 'round the corner o' the hill, out o'

sight o' the fire. We kin git out an' slip off 'thout the reds seein' or hearin' us."

"Come, then, let's go. We must hunt for Agnes. She may be lost in the woods."

"Wait—the reds 'll wonder why we don't make some fuss. Take an' shoot out through the bresh," suggested Andy.

The two rifles cracked, and a chorus of triumphant yells came from without. The savages no doubt believed that their prey were getting desperate at the near approach of suffocation.

Goochland then piloted the way through the tunnel, after securing their rifles to their persons, and though for a goodly distance they were forced to drag their bodies along with their hands, the outer air was at length gained, and once more they stood beneath the starry canopy of heaven, free men!

"So much for so much," uttered Andy drawing a long breath of relief. "We're out o' *thet* trap, and pesky lucky we may consider ourselves, too. Ef we was alone—ef 'twasn't fer the gal, I mean, I'd crawl down thar an' hev one crack at *thet* durned runnygade, ef 't killed me!"

"No—we mustn't do it. Think of her—Agnes. We must look for her, first. She is wandering in the woods, no doubt, lost and suffering terribly, in mind, if not body."

"I don't know 'bout *thet*. Look here. She couldn't 'a' got out o' thar afore dark, 'thout some o' them pesky imps a-seein' her, *shore*. Ef they'd 'a' see'd her, they'd 'a' got her. They *hain't* got her—then they *didn't* see her, which means *thet* she didn't go out ontel a'ter dark. Ef she was smart enough to fool *them*, she was smart a plenty to know which way to go to look fer help. Then sh's gone *thar*—which is down the lake, to'ards the fort. See?" argumentatively uttered Goochland.

"I believe you reason correctly. But it is dark—though nearly morning—and we might pass her in the woods. What had we best do first?"

"Go to the lake, git in the canoe an' strike out fer the river. We kin lay low then, an' wait fer her, or ontel it's light enough to find her trail. Then we kin foller it up. These imps'll be apt to stay whar they is ontel day. The rocks won't git cold enough, much afore then, so they kin

crawl in to find us. *They're out o' the game, a'ready,*" confidently uttered Andy.

"Well, then, to the lake. Come on," and the two scouts headed at once toward the spot where they had left their confiscated canoe.

CHAPTER XII.

LEGS VS. PADDLES.

TIME had passed more rapidly than the scouts had thought, and morning was close at hand. Whether this was to be regretted or otherwise, they were yet in doubt. If it increased their chances of finding Agnes, it also increased their danger of being discovered by the Indians.

They reached and entered their canoe, then paddled slowly and cautiously down the lake shore, where the gloom was deepest, knowing that they ran less danger there than further out in the lake, where the water reflected the starry light too clearly for them to venture.

"Stop, Andy," muttered Oscar, peering keenly in toward the shore. "What is that lying yonder, on the sand?"

"A chunk, or stick, I reckon. Why?"

"No—look! as I live 'tis the bundle of provisions we put up at the cabin. Pull in—she must have dropped it, and we'll find her trail there."

To his joy, he found that his surmise was correct, and, by stooping low down, he could distinguish the footprints left by Agnes in her frantic flight. Hope rekindled in his heart, and his voice trembled with gladness as he bade Andy paddle along, while he followed the trail.

His progress was necessarily slow until the day dawned; then he advanced at a rapid rate. He ran where Agnes had fallen in the swoon, and his heart bled as he thought of the trials she must have undergone.

As yet they had received no token of an enemy being in the vicinity, and as the river was neared, their hopes in-

ceased. Then Andy uttered a low cry, and drove the canoe to land.

He sprung to shore, and then ran along a few yards, when he suddenly paused and leveled his long rifle. Oscar stared at him in mute amazement.

The rifle cracked. Then followed a shrill yell—a yell of death-agony, telling that the old scout had fired at a human mark, and that his hand and eye had been true to his will.

"It's the gal, Oscar—press on! ther may be more o' the imps!" shouted Goochland, as he sprung forward, dextrously reloading his rifle at the same time.

With a wild cry Jewett dashed past him toward the cabin, where he could now see the form of the maiden he had learned to love even in that brief but eventful time since they first met, lying motionless upon the ground, beside a huge savage, whose form still writhed in agony, and with one hand fastened in a death-grip in the flowing hair of Agnes Letcher. Oscar thought of nothing but her possible danger.

Not so Goochland. He heard a chorus of shrill yells ringing in the forest behind him, coming from near the lake shore, and turning, he beheld a horde of savages with Girty limping along in their rear, rushing toward them at full speed.

For a moment he was undecided, but then as he saw Oscar gain Agnes' side unmolested, he dashed toward the canoe, and with desperate energy urged it down the river.

"Quick! Oscar, fetch her down. The Injuns is on us—quick, fer your life!" he yelled, as he checked the boat at the rude landing, from which a path led up to the cabin.

Jewett realized the peril at a glance, and seizing the fainting maiden in his strong arms, he dashed down to the canoe, when Andy shoved it off. As the boat skimmed along, a hasty volley was sent after them by the Indians, but without effect.

"Buckle to it, lad—the imps air chasin' us," muttered Andy.

But Oscar needed no such adjuration. He was working for more than his own life now—for that of the maiden he loved.

The savages, urged on by the infuriated renegade, chased

the canoe for a considerable distance, but were left far in the rear. And then relaxing their efforts, the scouts paddled on more leisurely.

Agnes quickly recovered from her swoon. The bullet of Goochland had prevented the savage from injuring her, if, indeed such had been his real intention.

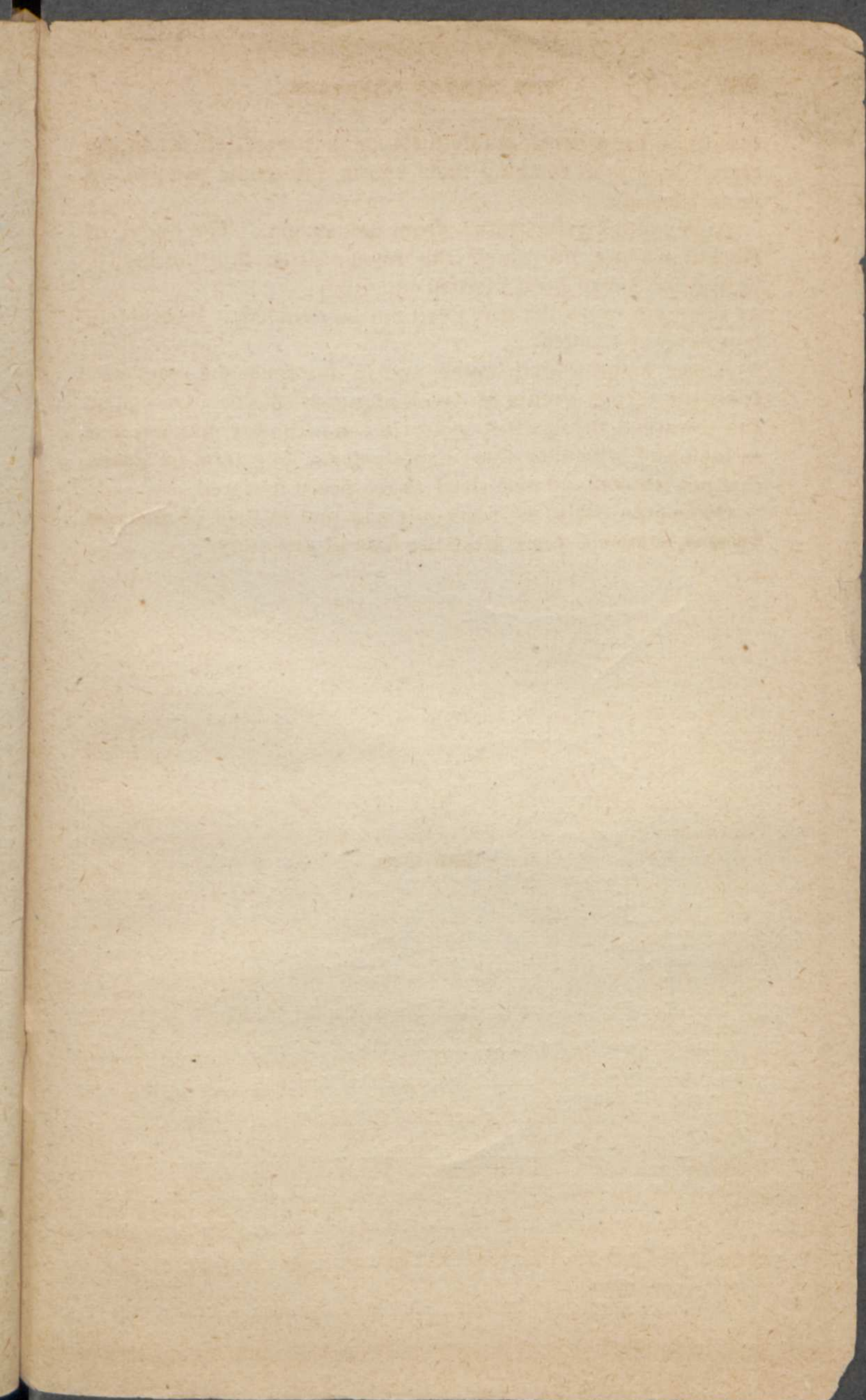
The journey to the fort need not be detailed. Henceforth it was uninterrupted.

Agnes found a kind home, and in due time she recovered from the trying events of those nights of flight. Of course she rewarded the gallant scout in the orthodox manner, and as man and wife they lived happily for a long term of years.

Andy Goochland also lived to see peace declared.

Of George Girty, we need only add that he died of *delirium tremens*, some six years after the date of our story.

THE END.



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